

HATCH-BILLOPS COLLECTION, INC.

ARTIST AND INFLUENCE 1986
VOLUME VII

THE CHALLENGES OF WRITING
BLACK BIOGRAPHY



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Leroy S. Hodges, Jr., Joe Weixlmann,
Thadious Davis, Arnold Rampersad, and
Nell Irvin Painter.

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Kenneth Manning, John A. Williams,
James V. Hatch, and Robert Hemenway.

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ARTIST AND INFLUENCE 1986

Volume VII

presents

THE CHALLENGES OF WRITING BLACK BIOGRAPHY

Edited by

Leo Hamalian and James V. Hatch

HATCH-BILLOPS COLLECTION, INC.

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A WORD ABOUT THE 1986 ISSUE

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Camille Billops
James V. Hatch
Publishers

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REPORT ON THE

PROGRESS OF THE WORK DURING THE YEAR 1901

BY THE

COMMISSIONERS OF THE LAND OFFICE

IN RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

PASSED ON THE 11TH MARCH 1902

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IN RESPONSE TO A RESOLUTION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

PREFACE

James V. Hatch is Professor of English at The City College of New York. He is Co-Founder of the Hatch-Billops Collection and is currently researching to write a biography of the poet/playwright Owen Dodson.

On May 3, 1986 at the invitation of the Hatch-Billops Collection, and the Humanities Division of The City College of New York, the eight authors represented here assembled in a symposium at the Center for Worker Education. These writers spoke about their frustrations, their visions, their experiences, and a persistent notion that had become an insistent question: are the challenges of writing black lives significantly different from those challenges encountered in writing so-called "mainstream" lives?

The question had been crystalized in a perceptive article by Arnold Rampersad in the Yale Literary Review, "Biography, Autobiography, and Afro-American Culture." Professor Rampersad had delineated some of the cultural reasons that black and white biographies reflect our nation's racial dichotomy and historic paradox. Because the answers to racial riddles are rarely simple, the authors of these essays here provide some answers, but end, as they must, by posing more questions.

Thadious Davis asks how does the biographer separate fact from fiction, when the subject of the biography may have gone to some length to impose upon the world a "self-created" fiction, a tactic which may have been a life-sustaining strategy, indeed, one which black people have found necessary for day to day survival in a hostile America?

Another aspect of the same dilemma is faced by Robert Hemenway, who examines the discrepancies often found between the private and the public papers of a deceased individual, in this case, Zora Neale Hurston. Are these discrepancies likely to be greater for black lives than white? Which documents hold the truth?

Too often papers are denied to researchers. Because articulate Blacks have frequently been the subject of CIA, FBI, Department of State surveillance, many authors experience difficulty obtaining government documents. The reasons, in part, are because those very papers demonstrate ipso facto the racist intent in those who ordered their collection. LeRoy Hodges demonstrates the elaborate process that was necessary to obtain the files on expatriot William Gardner Smith.

All biographers hope to create a real living presence in the pages of their book. Authors of black biography may face

special problems. Kenneth Manning, whose particular concerns lay in recreating the life of black biologist, Ernest Everett Just, asks how may the writer create a human being that will circumvent the reader's stereotyped notions of what the reader believes a black and a scientist should be.

Not everyone writes about artists, intellectuals, and the special achievers. When Nell Irvin Painter writes about working class people, she can not rely on the existence of written documents, but she must develop special tools. When those working people are also Black, are the problems compounded?

Among the new tools available to the writer in the twentieth century, Arnold Rampersad asks whether psychoanalytic techniques are valid for the investigation of Black lives, and if so, what are the political and racial implications?

And when a biographer has finally found, researched, and written his book, how does he find a publisher? John A. Williams recounts some experiences in which both the race of the biographer and the race of the subject have had a bearing upon how the book is likely to be published.

Because getting the book into print concerns all writers, Joe Weixlmann, attempts to arm the biographer with the computer which may someday, with the arrival of desk top publishing, mean independence for the authors of a black biography.

This collection of essays, with their diverse but congruent voices, is offered here with the hope that they will aid and inspire biographers to present the truth, not only of black lives in America, but of all human beings.

Acknowledgements

The Hatch-Billops Collection, Inc., is grateful to those individuals who helped make the seminar a success. Our appreciation is extended to Professor Jerome Brooks, Chairman of the English Department of The City College of New York, who graciously delivered the welcoming address; to Professor Leonard Kriegel, the Director, and to Dr. Steve Leberstein, the Executive Director of the Center for Worker Education for providing facilities to host the seminar; and to Dean of Humanities, Paul Sherwin, who assisted with the funding.

INTRODUCTION

Paul Sherwin is the Dean of Humanities at The City College of New York.

There is one part of me that is responsive and sympathetic to remarks such as Keats' that "A man's life, of any worth, is a continual allegory, and very few eyes can see the mystery of his life." Or Yeats', "We may come to think that nothing exists but a stream of souls, that all knowledge is biography." Or Emerson's, "There is properly no history, only biography."

A number of allied idealizations come to mind--that biography is not only a means of humanizing history, but the most profound expression of the meaning of history. For history is meaningful to the extent that it is understood as lived or living history, and we can most effectively recreate history through our sympathetic identification with those who in fact experienced it, shaped it, suffered through it. One might dwell on the universal or near universal interest we have in the lives of others, our desire or need to enter into the lives of their minds. One might emphasize biography as a legitimate literary form not unlike the novel; the central concern of both genres being character, the disclosure of the essential pattern or essence of a life, the genius or spiritual form of an individual, as Blake would have it.

Still thinking idealistically, I would say that what moves me most about the biographical project is its redemptive drive, the saving of an individual as individual or as the representative of a group, from obscurity--the saving of a personality as a living presence for the company of future generations. Here is Catherine Drinker Bowen in her Adventures of a Biographer, (1959). "The more I learned about Oliver Wendell Holmes, the more insupportable it became to think of him as dead, cold and motionless beneath that stone at Arlington. I found myself possessed by a witch's frenzy to ungrave this man, stand him upright, see him walk, jump, dance, tell jokes, make love, display his vanity or his courage as the case might be. National encomium, the laying on of laurels, had only buried him deeper. The difficulty was to uncover material that gave proof of life--not noble, public postures, but characteristic brief turns of phrase, small oddities and manners that belonged to Holmes and Holmes alone." I like that play on ungraving Holmes, of seeing him dancing and joking, of humanizing the noble dead, rendering him imaginatively accessible to us.

I am often struck by how much better I think I know many of those whose biographies I've read than I know my own contemporaries. In truth it seems to me that the lives of

the dead often seem to have more reality, more substantiality, and more coherence than my own life as I live it in all its chaos, all its fragmentation. This discrepancy may in part account for our interest in typical biographies, for they support the illusion that anyone's life can be reduced to a coherent pattern, that any of us possesses a coherent self which is, at least hypothetically, totalizable and complete.

We need biographies that are aware of the inherent difficulty, and even the impossibility of the biographical project, for one either knows too much or too little about the subject at any given moment and one may have the facts, but the facts are often unreliable or merely obscure, and they always require interpretation. When one interprets a life, subjecting the facts of a life or whatever facts one can extract from a life to all the devices which the Freudians call secondary revision, of selection and subordination and highlighting and reordering, one is subjecting the "real life" to an order that is imposed by the needs and compulsions of the biographer, who is constrained by the demands of a certain kind of narrative performance, the need to establish the coherence of a particular biography.

Finally, I will say that a truly humanistic biography would remain open to and draw imaginative strength from its recognition of the difficulty of the biographical task, of resisting easy imaginative or aesthetic access to the life or mind of another individual. One can at least imagine a biography that proceeds toward a sense of the essence of an individual's life, extracting that sense from the chaos and density of lived experience, and that yet generates the illusion that this individual is a living being in the midst of an uncertain life--that the life, as narrated, is not already over, past. The need is to make the life present, to convey a sense of the in-betweenness of life, of the unfolding mind's responses to a swarm of unlived possibilities at a time when everything might have turned out otherwise. "Enough or too much" as Blake would have it. I look forward to reading about the particular challenges of writing black biography.

SEPARATING FACT FROM SELF-CREATED FICTION

Thadious Davis is Professor of English at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. She is author of Faulkner's Negro: Art and the Southern Context. Currently she is researching and writing a biography of the novelist, Nella Larsen.

At the outset, I must admit that the use of the word "fact" is problematical. "Fact," no matter how it is verified objectively, does not make meaning; arrangement and interpretation do. Both are subjective processes that assist in making a life coherent and ordered. Meaning emerges from manipulating patterns of arrangement and interpretation. These patterns should, of course, take their impetus from what can be verified, from "fact," but clearly facts can buttress different meanings simply by virtue of their presentation in particular sequences. In Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form, Ira Bruce Nadel uses the term "authorized fictions: to mean "the alteration of facts into new forms which, despite their original or inventive presentation, do not lose their authenticity." His point is that language and composition combine to transform the shape of fact.

In the writing of biography, the legitimacy of fact is a given, but what constitutes truth in fact may not be as obvious as Leon Edel suggests in Literary Biography when he stresses that "all biography...is concerned with the truth of life and the truth of experience," that the material is predetermined, that the biographer's telling leaves the material unaltered, since "the biographer, like the historian, is a slave to his documents." It seems to me, that the biographer actually confronts not only disparate materials and facts out of which to shape a life, but also encounters different truths in the same process. These truths are relative to the biographer's own understanding of the materials, and coming to understanding is filled with pitfalls created by diverse factors, such as a paucity of factual records, the zealousness of heirs or executors, the identification of the biographer with the subject, the fictions of autobiographical material, and other configurations that function alone or in combination to impede understanding.

My concern here is with the fictions of self-created by biographical subjects themselves, and with the problem these fictions produce for the writer of biography, especially black literary biography. Literary artists trade in creativity; the nature of their work encompasses the ability to create fictitious lives that have all the hallmarks of actual, lived experience. Effective literary artists become proficient in harnessing imagination and memory to invent

plausible characters, paradigmatic events. They also become adept at distorting boundaries of time and space, at moving within fluid realities. Their creative impulse is not necessarily restricted to characters in their literary works. It can carry over to their own lives in major and minor ways, as for example a Zora Neale Hurston shaving as much as a decade off her age, an Alice Walker envisioning herself as an ardent civil rights activist, or a Richard Wright rewriting his family history in order to emphasize the singularity of his individual achievement. These examples are different from a public reticence about personal matters or from a personal will to protect privacy, both of which can result in a twofold desire for concealment and revelation. They appear, instead, to be instances of conscious creation of a private self for public consumption. Such webs of fiction, threaded throughout the individual's existence and interactions, eventually become part of the dominant image of self or they become inextricably tied to the conception of self that initially attracts the biographer to the subject's life.

What does the biographer do when public documents conflict with the subject's rendition of the facts of his or her life? How should the biographer proceed when the subject's memory and imagination join to invent a controlling autobiographical metaphor? What should the biographer do when confronted with fictions of self generated and perpetuated by a subject? How does the biographer realign personal truth, private meaning, and public record while retaining the integrity of the subject?

These questions and this problem are not peculiar to black literary biography in isolation. William Faulkner, a master fabulist, claimed not only to have suffered a serious leg injury while a World War I pilot, but also to have required a steel plate in his head after one of his Royal Air Force exploits. Both claims eventually became explanations of his dependency on alcohol. Years after it was apparent that his claims were, at best, exaggerated, he still insisted on the validity of his wartime adventures, though he no longer felt inclined to discuss the specific details. Katherine Anne Porter, on the other hand, did not claim such spectacular fictions for her life, but she created a childhood and youth for herself in which she grew up Catholic and attended a Catholic boarding school in New Orleans. Neither her fascination with Catholicism as a structure for her formative years nor her implicit rebellion against its formalism has ever been explained--not even by her most perceptive biographer, Joan Givner. Faulkner's most comprehensive biographer, Joseph Blotner, also tends to ignore the invention of formative experiences, while other Faulkner biographers dismiss the war exploits as the wishful

thinking of a provincial, romantic youth and overlook the insistence on heroism by a middle aged, established writer. Needless to say, both Faulkner and Porter created these and other aspects of their lives just as they created characters in their fictions.

For white and black literary artists, it would appear that creative development and formative creative experience may well encourage a form of experimental manipulation of events in their lives and the meaning that those events would impart to their public persona. But the private or interior self is also affected by the inventions; perhaps it is that they are the exterior manifestations of an internal reality that is stronger, more prevalent than any that could be structured by a given, discerned external reality. Separating fact from self-created fictions, then, is not an easy task for the biographer of a black or white literary artist.

Nonetheless, it seems that there are more risks involved when the subject is a black literary artist because the impulse toward self-created fictions is compounded by the complexity of race in American life and thought. Black artists achieve against the odds, achieve despite the obstacles confronting any person of color. Race and the politics of racial survival mean, in part the difficulty of equal access to self-expression, the saying and telling that is the business of the literary artist. The models for the individual are overwhelmingly of the white race, and patterns are more typically adopted from that race. For example, Nella Larsen, a novelist during the Harlem Renaissance, came into the public eye in the 1920s with a clear sense of literary achievement and of the literary artist. In an era of race consciousness that celebrated upward mobility and middle-class values, she rewrote her life both for white consumption and for her black contemporaries. She wanted to belong to what she termed "the better class of blacks," for whom comfort and position ameliorated the effects of racism. Though she had the unique opportunity to reveal the impact not only of race, but also of gender and class upon the individual, she chose to conform to expected standards, and she chose to represent herself as well-born, well-bred, well-educated, and very cosmopolitan, as essentially one black person no different from whites. She invented an autobiography that made her special--a "mulatto," daughter of a "Danish lady and a Negro from the Virgin Islands," as she wrote in her 1927 publicity statement for Alfred A. Knopf, her publisher. Moreover, despite never having attended a college, she claimed to have attended not only the black Fisk University in Nashville, but also the Scandinavian University of Copenhagen and the mainly white Columbia University. She was not to be outdone, or out-educated, by the college

educated likes of Jessie Fauset, Langston Hughes, and Zora Hurston. Even though she had actually graduated from the Lincoln Hospital School of Nursing in New York, which was at the time a leading national institution for training black nurses, Larsen found that fact inadequate. In transforming her life, she apparently intended to make herself more like achieving whites and different from oppressed blacks. Her motives for creating herself anew functioned in tandem with a belief in interracial achievement that truncated the complexity of both race relationships and racism. Although all available legal documents contradict most of Larsen's construction of her background and credentials, almost all of her contemporaries, people whom she trusted and liked, validate her portrait of herself, and their validation appears to have assisted her total development into the person she wanted to be.

In attempting to write about her life, the biographer finds the deceptions and inventions transparent, but at the same time faces the problem of presenting them to a larger audience. Clearly, her contribution to literature is not determined by the fictions she created for her own life, yet it may well be shaped and positively so, by those fictions. Some truth about Larsen's historical, cultural, racial, aesthetic, and emotional reality is probably embedded in the self that she created and the self she became. However, if the biographer believes that the dual psychological burden of being a female representative both of the race and of an upwardly mobile class combined to foster Larsen's reinventing of a self which she perceived as more acceptable, more compatible somehow with her aims, then the biographer may have to wrestle with the question of how to arrange and pattern the presentation of this idea, especially so that viable facts are not in competition with imagined details for meaning. Is it fair, in a different historical moment, to present Larsen's invented life with scientific objectivity? I suspect not, because careful attention to race, gender, and class--which Larsen's story clearly requires, and which current literary criticism would expect--results in a kind of subjectivity.

Black individuals who come into public purview and perceive themselves as significant, labor hard enough to make themselves worthy of accolades, and not simply in the field of their endeavors or work. Self-enhancement of personal achievement may be considered deceptive on the one hand, but on the other, it may also be considered a necessary response to being black in a world of antagonistic or indifferent to blacks. To undermine efforts at validating black life by negating the reality drawn by one individual seems unfair, particularly if one is sensitive to the contexts of the fictions created by the subject and empathizes with the

alternative reality they shape. A black person who creates an identity to conform to a bicultural, biracial environment out of a need to forward personal ambitions and aspirations perhaps should be treated with care, with an evenhanded attempt to understand the racial messages embedded in that act of creation.

The vociferous "I am somebody" slogan of the late 1960s and early 1970s may have been nationalistic and individualistic, but it was, as well, a highly audible version of the private statement made by black literary artists, such as Nella Larsen, who mediated the public and private forces conspiring, by law or custom, to constrict black lives. Racial imperatives have to be taken into account, as much as aesthetic, psychological, and ideological imperatives. Sifting through, selecting, and evaluating aspects of a subject's life should not obscure the subject's lived experience as a black person. Though advocacy for racial fictions is probably dangerous business, such advocacy may function, whether consciously or not, in the biographer's choice of language and form, which determine whether impressions and images of the life will appear positive or negative. Nevertheless, the biographer is bound by cultural and historical forces as much as is the subject, and in balancing responsibility to divergent impulses, the biographer may, at least in some instances, have to admit that fact is not the primary determinant of a black life and its meaning, and that a compendium of facts in a comprehensive volume is not the only valid version or reading of a life. Racial and cultural violations ought, ideally, to be avoided, but at what expense I am not yet prepared to answer.

BIOGRAPHY, CAPTIVE OF THE WRITTEN RECORD

Robert Hemenway is presently Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Oklahoma. His biography Zora Neale Hurston was one of the New York Times "Best Books of 1978."

I would like to identify a special problem in writing biography, then relate it to Black Biography specifically, illustrating the problem in the biography of Zora Neale Hurston. The problem generally stated is, the private document or private papers problem: the way in which the biographer finds himself or herself constantly influenced, (entrapped might be an appropriate word) by the private documents that the subject leaves behind to arrest oblivion.

I am talking about manuscripts, letters, diaries, journals, contracts, field notes, marginalia, what-have-you. I am referring to any manuscript or document which is not part of the public record, which has not been known previously, and which yields important insights into the subject's life. Obviously, this so-called "problem" is paradoxical, because without private papers a biographer is severely limited.

Without private papers, biographers are left with published accounts, windy speculations, tentative re-creations of events, biographical readings of an author's work, public documents, and of course, if the subject lived recently enough, oral history.

But the writing of biography is difficult. It is laced with anxiety. It is such a difficult task that any biographer, let's admit it, will kill, maim, or destroy for access to private papers. It is a pathology which is well-documented in literary history. Henry James's The Aspern Papers captures it best. Any biographer who is worth his or her salt will occasionally ask, have I succumbed to this monomania for private documents, this occupational hazzard of biography?

The reason for wanting private papers is self-evident. Biography has an insatiable need to see the subject unclothed, to observe the unguarded moment. We accept as an article of faith that the essential self is revealed in that intimate moment when the world was not watching - the love letter, the angry complaint to an editor about the avarice of publishers, the diary entry which reveals sexual anxiety.

And yet, as we pursue these private papers, we also know the private moments that they offer may be only an illusion, that the contrived intimacy may be only a cunningly staged drama for posterity. You can almost hear the subject laughing: "That will confuse those publishing scoundrels!" Still we search for, we need, the private documents that no one else knows about, that will authenticate our view of the subject - the letter that will make our account ring true, that will open up the true self to an unknowing world.

My own experience teaches that biography is virtually impossible without private papers. And yet I also realize how very often these private papers become a two-edged sword.

In late 1977, I published a biography of Zora Neale Hurston. Hurston was a novelist and a folklorist, born in 1891, died in 1960. Her collection of folklore, Mules and Men, published in 1935 is in many ways still the best collection of Afro-American folklore ever published. Her novel Their Eyes Are Watching God, 1937, is one of the classics of American literature, probably one of the four or five best novels ever written by a Black American author. She was a fascinating woman and an awesome talent who studied anthropology with Franz Boaz, packed a pistol in her purse, sang the blues in juke joints, became a voodoo priestess, graduated from Barnard, and wrote seven major books between the 1930s and the 1940s. She was a person who had a legendary reputation for wit. She once called a fellow writer "a cross between a duck-billed platypus and a dictionary gone crazy through the hips." Another time she said of a Black show on Broadway, "It has about as much Negro in it as Cal Coolidge had in him." She had a distinguished career and she died penniless in a welfare home in St. Lucie County, Florida, pretty much forgotten by both public and friends.

When I began working on Hurston's biography in 1970, seven years before it was published, the information available from published accounts was hopelessly contradictory. Whole decades of her life were missing from the public record. We didn't even know for sure what she had written; there were conflicting accounts of what the Hurston canon really was. There were at least three different accounts of how and where she died. One account said she died in a seedy hotel room in Jacksonville, Florida. Another said that she died well-off in Miami Beach. Another said that she died in her hometown of Eatonville. None of these reports turned out to be true.

Normally in this kind of a situation, we expect the subject's autobiography to help clear up the confusion. Hurston's autobiography, entitled Dust Tracks on a Road, published in 1942, contributes to the confusion and contradiction about her life. For example, in that volume she forgot to mention her first husband's name, or when they were married. She apparently forgot that they ever divorced at all. Beyond this omission, she forgot altogether to mention her second marriage. Finally, she forgot to mention when she was born. In fact, Dust Tracks on a Road is perhaps the only American autobiography, excluding slave narratives, in which the author does not include her date of birth.

We now know, because of Cheryl Wall of Rutgers, working with the census records of Hurston's hometown of Eatonville, that Hurston was actually born in 1891, ten years prior to the date listed as a birthdate in my biography. 1891 is also ten years previous to the date that Hurston herself listed on such documents as driver's licences, fellowship applications, and income tax returns. So there are ten years of Hurston's life she simply edited out of the public record. It poses some fascinating speculations. It means that when Hurston returned to college at Howard in 1919 she was actually 29 years old. She was a classic case of what is often referred to as the "reentry woman," someone who has been out in the work force and has returned to school.

Given this absence of reliable information, it didn't take any great genius to realize that better evidence would have to come to hand before a biography could be written. To seek that evidence, I bought a pick-up camper which became my home for the next ten months. I drove around the country trying to put together the private papers of Zora Neale Hurston. I drove 30,000 miles between August and June of the 1970-71 school year, supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Because I was mobile and able to follow one lead to another, I was able to put together for the first time the private papers and documents that Hurston had left behind, in some cases by design, in others by a kind of reckless abandon. During that trip and a number of other trips over the next five years, I found Hurston manuscripts and letters at archives, such as those at Fisk, Howard, and the Schomburg collection. Others showed up in archives at the American Philosophical Society, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Florida Historical Society, and the Miami Public Library.

The Miami Public Library story is instructive. I was trying to arrange my trip so I would be in Miami during January of that year. I went to the Public Library and asked if they had any books on Hurston. The librarian said, "Oh, not only do we have books, we have some of her letters. As a matter of fact, she wrote them to me."

There was another cache of letters in the Scribner's files that Scribner's didn't even know about. While talking to her editor, I asked, "Do you think there might be files of your correspondence?" He said, "I don't think so but I'll have somebody check." Fifteen minutes later a whole correspondence file appeared.

Papers showed up in unexpected places. The closet of one of her best friends produced a manuscript attacking the NAACP for having a "Communist flavor." In North Carolina, because I was floating around, mail had to be sent to me by general delivery. General delivery in Hillsboro, North Carolina, provided me with an entire file of her letters to her literary agency. The agent said, "I saw your inquiry in the Times and you probably have more use for these than I do. I hope they reach you."

In a forty room mansion in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, her publisher dug up some letters from his files and let me pound on a voodoo drum she had given him when she returned from Haiti. All in all, I found over three hundred letters, five thousand pages of manuscript, hundreds of other private papers and documents relating to Hurston's life in places as remote as White Sulphur Springs, Montana and as familiar as the New York Public Library.

In the course of such an effort, the biographer comes to realize the collective and communal nature of the enterprise. So many people helped me, willingly and unwillingly, that I realized the biographical enterprise becomes a communal activity. When eventually published, it is as much someone else's work as yours because they have contributed so much to it.

It is a very exciting and also humbling experience for the biographer to share this search for private papers with others. People are generous, they care, they are committed to the discovery and dissemination of biographical knowledge, and somewhere we should start an organization for the sole purpose of putting up a statue to the manuscript librarians and archivists of the world.

My point is to establish my credentials for talking about the other side of the paradox: ways which private documents, or sometimes their absence, can limit biography and distort the biographical text. As readers of biography, we should be especially alert to those characteristics of biography dependent upon the nature and extent of the private papers to which the biographer has gained access.

Readers of biography should pay attention to where one chapter ends and the next chapter begins. Pay attention to the chapter breaks because what will fall between chapters are the documents missing from the biographer's collection. Chapter breaks often are deliberately designed to disguise the absence of information. There is a logic to this, an implied causality. When you end here and begin there, the assumption is that here leads to there. But often a chapter break means only that the biographer had to get from here to there, because there is where his documents begin again.

Let me cite a specific example of this problem. Chapter Four of the Hurston biography ends with a reference to a letter from Zora Neale Hurston to Langston Hughes of March 17, 1927. There are a few remaining paragraphs in the chapter, but basically it constitutes the last fact of the chapter. Chapter Five begins in September of 1927. The five month gap exists because I didn't know much about Zora Neale Hurston's whereabouts between March and September of 1927. There are almost no documents and papers for this five month period, with one notable exception. In May of 1927, Zora Neale Hurston, in St. Augustine, Florida, married a young medical student named Herbert Sheen. The marriage license exists. Hurston, however, never left any notes or letters which would help us understand this time in her life. (This is true, incidentally, for almost all of the truly private relationships in Hurston's life.) Consider for a moment how this lack of private documents might distort Hurston's story, both in the paper's absence (not being there to tell us anything) and in the survival of the few preserved from this period.

Basically we have two letters, one to Langston Hughes in March of 1927 and another to Hughes in September of 1927. In between, we have only a marriage licence. What happened during those six months? Obviously, Zora Neale Hurston was on a honeymoon, apparently a honeymoon with a man whom she loved very much. If the right kind of records for that period existed, the biographer might be able to develop a portrait that would really sell, two young lovers sunning on the Florida beach, taking leisurely swims in the afternoon,

holding hands in the sunset. With any luck at all, you could get twelve minutes on television with this story. Some biographers will paint precisely the kind of account I just gave, on no more evidence than the fact that the marriage licence was there, and that at one point in her autobiography, Hurston said she loved this man she married. The temptation is strong; a romantic idyll satisfies a large number of readers.

But did it happen that way? Maybe it did and maybe it didn't. Maybe they fought like cats and dogs. Maybe they found out almost immediately that marriage was a lousy idea, and they spent the time figuring out how to go their separate ways (which, in fact, they did). No matter how you read this event, the absence of records distorts the biographical record; we know little about Zora Neale Hurston as wife or as lover, and the lack of documents causes us to present her in something less than what was probably her capacity for passion.

Yet, the documents that do survive distort the picture as well. When telling Hurston's story, we probably over-estimate her relationship with Hughes. Frequently they are mentioned together. Sometimes they are talked about as possible lovers. Certainly they were close friends. In this particular case the documents that survive are those two letters to Hughes, one here and one here, nothing in between. So you end with Hughes, and you begin with Hughes when you are writing a narrative of 1927 in Hurston's life. We have a right to ask, "Was Hughes all that important to Zora Neale Hurston in 1927?" Maybe not. She apparently had other men on her mind; she went ahead and married one of them. But because his letters survive, we tend to overemphasize the friendship. Those two letters are a secure rock in a sea of speculation.

As readers of biography we should also suspect the claim that a relatively small incident has exemplary or symbolic significance. It may or it may not, but a biographer's extended exposition of a relatively insignificant event is almost always determined by the availability of private documents.

Again, I cite my own book. I devoted an entire chapter to a play called Mule Bone written jointly by Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston. It was the subject of a great deal of controversy between them. I won't rehearse the details of that episode. I believe, as I said in the biography, that the Mule Bone tale illustrates the complex tensions in

Hurston's life that arose from patronage and personality. I stand by that statement. I will also admit that my twenty pages of analysis of Mule Bone exist because the documents were there. In the full parabola of both Hurston's and Hughes's life, the event may not merit a full chapter. Certainly if you think about Hurston's life long interest in folklore or Hughes' fascination with politics, that particular episode of authorial squabbling may not be so important. Yet there is such a complete record of the controversy, including a long narrative letter from Langston giving his side of things (all of it nicely packaged together in the Alain Locke Papers at Howard University) that the biographer is almost forced to utilize the document.

The Mule Bone documents illustrate another important characteristic of private papers: the utter randomness of their survival. There is no god or goddess of biography who looks down from Olympus to protect the evidence. Some letters survive and some don't. Why one letter survives and not the other has no logic whatsoever. And it is dangerous to impute logic to it. The Mule Bone papers survive because of Locke's fastidiousness. But the logic of survival does not exist. Someone's uncle thought Harold might be successful, and said, "Let's save these letters." Someone's Mother saved everything. Someone else's Father threw out everything during spring cleaning. There is no logic to why one piece of evidence survives and another doesn't. I was recently at Florida A & M University, and I met a woman whose father had been an agent for the Southern Railway during the 1950s and he had tried to help Zora Neale Hurston find a trunk full of manuscripts lost in transit from New York to Florida. They never found them. It is my hope that it is somewhere in an antique store in Tallahassee, waiting for one of us to discover.

Hurston's literary agent later told me that he would have thrown out her letters in another year or so. He said, "Look, the account hasn't made any money in years, even in reprint rights." The only reason we know anything about Hurston's final years is that a deputy sheriff was dispatched, after her death, to stop the burning of her surviving papers. The welfare home official had begun burning a trunk full of her manuscripts. If the deputy sheriff had been fifteen minutes late, or if there had been less water pressure in St. Lucie County, Florida, we wouldn't know much about the final ten years of Zora Neale Hurston's life.

A final example of how the constant discovery of new documents necessitates the continual revision of the biographical records. One of the most difficult things for any biographer is knowing when to stop, when to throw up your hands and say, "I can't discover any more," and write the damn thing. That is a perennial problem. That is the reason biographers are tentative people. They will tell you, "Well, I think this is what happened, but you might find something that will prove otherwise."

I am going to share with you a very small section of a new essay to be published at Howard in a festschrift of the late Charles Davis. It illustrates how exciting it can be to work with private correspondence. In 1926 Hurston wrote to Annie Nathan Meyer, one of her patrons and one of the founders of Barnard College. She wrote:

"Oh, Mrs. Meyer, the girls at Barnard are perfectly wonderful to me. They literally drag me to the teas on Wednesday and then behave as if I am the guest of honor, so eager are they to assure me that I am desired there. They have urged me to come to the Junior Prom at the Ritz Carleton in February as several girls have offered to exchange dances with me if I will bring a man as light as myself. Their frankness on that score is amusing, but not offensive in that dancing is such an intimate thing that it is not unreasonable for a girl to say who she wishes to do it with."

In Hurston's autobiography, she claims she encountered no racial prejudice at Barnard. As a matter of fact, she says, "I was Barnard's sacred black cow." Ten days later, Zora Neale Hurston wrote a second letter to Mrs. Meyer. We don't know what Mrs. Meyer communicated in the interim. Zora wrote:

"No doubt you are right about the prom. But even if things were different, I could not go. Paying twelve-fifty plus a new frock and shoes and a wrap and all the other things necessary is not my idea of a good time. I am not that ritzy yet. If I can simply continue to exist till June, I shall award myself with the croix de guerre. I was pleased however that the girls tried to make me feel good about it. Of course, I don't want to make any false steps and I am most fortunate in having you to halt me before I sprout donkey ears."

Why didn't Hurston tell Mrs. Meyer to go to hell? Why would she claim in her autobiography that she had experienced no prejudice? A rich story exists somewhere between these two letters, in this ten day period. That kind of story excites the biographer, because the private papers enable the biographer to put together an account of the subject's life which may be different than the account the subject has presented to the world.

So what is the final point? Only that biographers cannot live without private papers, but that they had better be careful about how they live with them. Private papers tend to cluster at chronological points. The year 1928 may produce a lot of papers, the year 1929 very few. Don't assume that 1928 was a more important year to the subject because the papers clustered there. 1929 may have been the more important year. Private papers also tend to survive institutionally. Letters to friends will probably be thrown away. Letters to the IRS will survive. The institutional nature of our lives can become overemphasized. Don't confuse the randomness of surviving papers with the randomness of life itself. These are different orders of reality. Finally, if you are going to write biography, find a subject who has saved everything: laundry lists, lover's notes, theatre tickets, what-have-you. It is a lot easier to have too much than too little. Once you have it, you have to free yourself from it. After all, no matter how successful you are at freeing yourself, you can at least point to the evidence that caused you to make so many mistakes.

OBTAINING DATA FROM GOVERNMENT FILES

The late LeRoy S. Hodges, Jr., received the Doctorat de l'Universite de Paris from the Sorbonne Nouvelle. He is the author of Portrait of an Expatriate: William Gardner Smith, Writer.

(Carl Lee is known to some in the audience as an actor and director. Carl died three Thursdays ago on April 17, 1986. He was the son of the late and noted actor Canada Lee. I would like to dedicate my subject in memory of Carl.)

I cannot think of a better way or manner to present my topic of obtaining data from government files than by narrating my own encounters, via correspondence, with the FBI, the United States State Department, and the CIA.

In a broad and, indeed, a stranger sense, biography as written in recent years, has added a new dimension and extremely valuable tool, that of the Freedom of Information Act and Privacy Act, commonly called "FOIA/PA". Its use to biographers is a very effective source that belies guesses, speculation, and in some cases, outright fabrications.

To begin the process, one must write a detailed letter to each stated agency requesting data on a particular individual. In my general area of research, I deal with personnel who have passed on or died. Additionally, nothing can be added or taken from the life, at least by way of "official" documentation.

One begins simply enough: after gathering the full name, or a/k/a (also known as) of the individual, including the date and place of birth and the date and place of death, you then write the FBI, CIA and the State Department. Within a month your letter is acknowledged and assigned a case number for future correspondence. All of your letters, actually the first one, should be notarized, sent certified or registered mail, and xeroxed for your files prior to mailing, with a copy of the obituary notice from a newspaper, periodical, death certificate, or funeral establishment.

In my book, Portrait of an Expatriate: William Gardner Smith, Writer, in the Introduction, I have written:

"The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) responded to my request by stating: 'The cost estimate for us to research for records regarding William Gardner Smith comes to a total of \$211.'"

Moreover, they added in their letter of 14 November, 1980:

"This consists of 7.5 hours of professional search time at \$8 per hour; two hours of clerical search time at \$4 per hour; one computer search at \$55 and two additional computer searches at \$8 per minute for 11 minutes of CPU time."

On November 16, 1980, I wrote to the CIA, now having received their \$211 letter dated two days prior, saying:

"As I expect to appeal any denials, please specify the office and address to which an appeal should be directed. I believe my request qualifies for a waiver of fees since the release of the requested information would primarily benefit the general public and be in the public interest. If a fee waiver is not granted, please consult me before proceeding if the fee is in excess of \$25. I reserve all rights to recover money paid for fees not waived. I expect a response to this request within ten (10) working days as provided in the Freedom of Information Act."

Their response is dated 4 December 1980:

"With respect to your request for a fee waiver, I have reviewed and considered the terms of your FOIA request and the amount and character of the information already in the public domain. I have determined that the information you seek from Agency files, if any even exists, would not primarily result in substantive benefit to the public. Accordingly, in this instance, search and reproduction fees must be charged for your request."

This, of course, is illegal. The government, the CIA, notwithstanding as an arm of our government, is not permitted to charge monies while a search for materials or data is being conducted. If there are an excessive number of records on the individual, they may charge you a small amount. This, by the way, can be waived; different agencies will let you know in advance. That, however, is merely the opening round in trying to secure requested data or materials.

On March 16, 1981, I again wrote the CIA stating:

"I have requested and here repeat my request that you waive these fees on the grounds that 'furnishing the information can be considered as primarily benefiting the general public.' The language of the FOIA makes clear the Congress intended that the assessment of fees not be a bar to private individuals or public interest groups seeking access to government documents. At the same time, it permitted the charging of fees so that corporations or individuals using the Act for private gain could be charged the cost of the services provided. The legislative history of the FOIA's provision calls for liberal interpretation of the phrase 'primarily benefiting the public.' This suggests that all fees should be waived whenever the release of the information contributes to the public debate on an important policy and when the person requesting the information is doing so for the purposes of contributing to the 'uninhibited, robust and wide open' debate on public issues. This approach means that all fees should be waived if two criteria are met: (1) the information will contribute to the public debate on important policy issues, and, (2) the information was requested so that it could be used for that purpose. Finally, since this request is for material which is clearly of benefit to the public, other persons will undoubtedly also request these records. It would be unfair if the first requester were to bear the full financial cost of the initial search. Since the information that is the subject of this letter fits the criteria spelled out by Congress for waiving of fees in the public interest, I believe that your agency should waive such fees, or, at the very least, reduce them substantially."

You now begin to wait. It is not unusual for months to pass before you receive some general information or, worse, deleted portions of files which have been omitted for reasons you cannot understand or, and this is terrible, entire pages deleted. Most severe is if you are sent blank pages, they are actually counted "readable" pages. The cover letter of received documents assures you that you can appeal deleted portions or material. At this point the pathetic correspondence begins with the requester on the receiving end. You write back appealing that you want the deleted or omitted data forwarded because what you have received does not make sense. After another several weeks or months, they sent a few more pieces to include, maybe, an addendum to what you originally appealed, with the new data released suffering from newly deleted portions. Again you repeat the same process with the same results. In short, I originally requested data on the subject beginning on September 8, 1980, and after writing to--in the case of the FBI--their superiors, the Department of Justice, the data began to flow

at a steadier pace. Briefly, on August 8, 1984, I received a couple of file copies stapled to a cover letter from the FBI stating:

"Reference is made to our letter of October 21, 1982, regarding your request on William Gardner Smith #202,517. By memorandum dated May 1, 1984, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) returned our referral. A total of sixteen documents containing CIA material were referred for review. The CIA has withheld its information in fifteen documents in its entirety pursuant to exemptions (b) (3) and (b) (1) of the Freedom of Information Act. Please see the attached form for a detailed explanation of these exemptions. One document is being withheld pursuant to (b) (1) and (b) (3). You have the right to appeal the above decision by addressing a letter setting out the basis of your appeal to the CIA Information Review Committee. This concludes the process of your request."

Needless to say, if I continued appealing, I would still be at it. So, after approximately four years--to be exact, three years and eleven months--my correspondence with the FBI, utilizing the Freedom of Information Act, was officially closed, even though I was tempted to further appeal the last data forwarded.

If nothing else, appealing the brief data they initially sent, plus my patience and correspondence, had paid off to a point. The CIA's demand for up-front money before they began their computer search ended when I did not send the monies they requested or actually demanded. On 3 May 1984, I was taken aback to receive a letter from the CIA. It reads:

"Dear Dr. Hodges: During the course of their search for records in response to your Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request concerning William Gardner Smith, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of State located material, the documents which required consultation with us. Of that material, the documents originating with CIA are addressed below. The remaining material has been returned with our determinations and may have already been addressed in correspondence to you. We have examined the CIA documents and have made the following review determinations: Enclosed are three memoranda, dated 11 July 1952, and 2 and 3 and 30 November 1964, from which material has been deleted under exemptions provisions of the (b) (1) and (b) (3) of the FOIA. All three documents were surfaced by the Bureau. The Department of State also surfaced the 1952 document. Nine other documents, dated 12 October 1965, 19 September 1967, 2 January, 8 February, 5, 14, and 29

March, and two of 4 April 1968, must be withheld in their entirety under the exemptions cited above. Enclosed, also, is an explanation of the exemptions. I am informing you of your right to appeal the above decisions by addressing your appeal to the CIA Information Review Committee, in my care. Should you decide to do this, please explain the basis of your appeal. We wish to apologize for the length of time it has taken us to complete the processing of your request. We have been inundated, however, by a large number of requests over the past several years. Under the circumstances, we can only do our best to apportion our time and efforts in a manner calculated to satisfy all of our requesters. Thus, we have adopted the policy of first-received, first answered. Thank you for your patience and consideration while we were completing the processing of your request."

The State Department sent thirty-eight pages of materials which basically consisted of Smith's application for a passport and its renewals.

As one can readily understand, attempting to retrieve data and material on an individual calls for patience, with the additional chore of corresponding. Of all the government agencies named, the FBI supplied most of the data with many portions deleted, but, however, providing an insight to the subject in a plain bureaucratic manner. They began keeping files on Smith at age twenty-one and continued through his death at age forty-seven, for a total of twenty-six years.

For those who wish to go the route of securing data under the Freedom of Information Act, all the best. Please do not get caught lacking patience or correspondence. As is said, "All good things come to those who wait."

Finally, at the beginning, I said, "One must write to each of the stated agencies requesting data on a particular individual" and cited my personal woes of gathering the materials and data. Let me close with this advise: contact FOIA, 145 West Fourth Street, New York, NY 10012, or by telephone: (212) 477-3188 for further information and request forms for those named agencies.

SCIENTIFIC BIOGRAPHY: ERNEST EVERETT JUST

Kenneth Manning is Professor of the History of Science at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is author of the biography Black Apollo of Science, The Life of Ernest Everett Just.

My notions about biographies are ones that evolved over a period of eight years, the time it took me to write Black Apollo of Science, The Life of Ernest Everett Just. Here, I will address two things: scientific biography and the challenges of writing black biography.

Scientific biography is a little different from other kinds of biography, mostly because it is perceived as being different. This has to do with the reader's view of science and what a scientist is. Scientific biography is for those interested in the life of the scientist. That seems obvious, yet it is a fundamental conviction that one has to have because most people do not think that scientists have lives. If you read biographies of scientists, you will usually come away with a feeling that the biography has not portrayed the life of a human being. The life itself must always be first and foremost. This is particularly important because in biography there is a tendency to use the life as an argument for a particular ideology. Whether the ideology is in the Marxist arena, or a particular view of Freud, or a particular view of racism, the biographer will often use the life of an individual as an excuse to vent their venom. That is a dreadful use of biography. Biography has to illuminate the individual life first and foremost.

In this same vein, scientific biography is not useful for someone whose interest is solely in the internal development of scientific ideas. There are historians of science who look at the development of Newton's concepts of motion or Maxwell's equations. There is a place for internal history of science, but that should not be confused with biography. There must be a clear interaction between the life and the work in the biography; one should not solely be interested in scientific ideas.

Scientific biography parallels biography in other fields as well. A good biography should elucidate the professional work of the subject, not devour it. This really becomes a problem with people such as transplanted literary critics, political analysts, and historians of science. They have this dreadful tension between dealing with the professional world and dealing with the life of the person. One should want to bring the two together to see how the one informs the other.

I read so many scientific biographies and felt unsatisfied because the writers spent all of their time hammering away at minute, unimportant scientific developments; the same may be said of literary critics, who do dreadful things to an author's work in the context of biography.

The reader of any biography should be piqued to read the work of the subject. After reading a biography of Langston Hughes, you might want to read some of his poetry. You should be captivated enough that you want to pursue the subject's work. This is more difficult in the case of a scientist because the work is usually not as accessible, however, the same principle holds true. The biographer should deal with the professional aspect in a way that is accessible to the audience.

Starting my work on E.E. Just, I immediately set certain goals. I wanted to portray human character. For writers of black biography, this is a major obstacle if you have a white audience. Because racism is so prevalent in society, you must get the reader to see the subject as an individual who has a personality, a character, a life, not someone who is merely a racial subject.

In addition to wanting to deal with the human character, I wanted certain issues in the history of science, American social history and Black history to emerge in the treatment of this life. I wanted to look at the motivation for choosing a career in science, the role of education in the scientific career, the opportunities in America for the professional development of Black intellectuals, financial support for Black academicians, the importance of institutions and scientific communities in the development of a career in science, and the role of patronage in science. There is also the question of racism in the world of science both in America and Europe that deserves a closer look. Then last but not least, I wanted to look at the effects of a scientific career on the personal life of a black man.

So often we talk about recruitment of Blacks to science. We talk about the benefits but rarely do we talk about the cost. The subject that is least written about in America is the plight of black professionals. They are utterly silent about the kinds of racism that they experience in their varied professions. I am interested in the kinds of costs associated with professional careers.

When I began researching the life of Just, there were essentially no biographical materials available. By that, I mean published biographical material. Right away I decided that I would use whatever method was necessary to investigate

the life history. I was not going to confine myself to one approach as opposed to another. If I needed to interview someone, I would. If I needed to check court records, I would. The entire process of putting his life together is another book. Suffice it to say that the sources are scattered. They are scattered throughout the world. They are at foundation archives, university archives, collections at marine stations, personal collections, letters, memorabilia. I was a bit more fortunate than a lot of people writing on other blacks because Just had interacted with a lot of important people who kept his correspondence. I went to the Rockefeller Archives and found hundreds of letters. It was helpful, but still difficult because his life was so confused and embattled with his own problems. His travel spanned several continents. In order to understand his life, I had to follow him all over.

A number of critics who reviewed my book commented on the "meticulous" research that went into the book. That is an interesting word because you are never quite sure if it is a compliment. I accept it as a compliment. I will explain. First of all, let me say that the extraordinary amount of research evident in the book is necessary to piece the story together. The fact of the matter is that there was no story there until the research was done and was written about.

Research is also necessary for credibility. I knew that I would be talking about a lot of difficult political, social, and human problems. Scholars would do whatever they could to discredit what I was putting together. The only way to deal with something like that is to go overboard and do more research than would ordinarily be required. I also felt thorough research was necessary for me as a black scholar. I knew that what whites could get away with in terms of documentation would be the kiss of death for me. I wanted to insure that the scholarly apparatus was sufficient.

Let me move away from research and talk about the writing. Generally, not enough attention is given to this aspect of the job. I immediately decided to write for a general audience because I have no particular use for the inaccessibility of a pure academic setting. Moreover, there is a problem when you decide to write for both a general and academic audience. It creates tension. The general audience wants clear, precise, readable prose and the academic audience wants jargons and confusion. Somehow you have to pull those two things together. I decided to err in favor of the general audience because I knew there would be problems in getting both kinds of readers to read about questions of racism.

Although I was determined to make the work accessible, I was equally determined to make intellectual as well as emotional demands. I wanted to make the reader think about things that he or she would not necessarily think about. I wanted to use the same sort of level of scholarly methodology that historians use.

I wanted to deal with motivation as would an historian. That is, realistically. It is possible to do so and at the same time make the story very, very interesting. Essentially, the difference between fact and fiction is that fact is often times more interesting. The biographer must also be able to create scenes around the documents. Biographers are confronted with very dull pieces of information. He or she has birth certificates, schedules of trains and airplanes, all of the these dreadfully boring documents. You really do have to be creative with them. You have got to bring out the texture of what this person's life was about. It is in no sense fictionalizing: it is the job of the biographer. I think the biographer has to have the same standards that a good novelist has. The work should be at the level of quality literature.

In writing black biography, you have to deal with the problem of readers lacking sophistication in their understanding of racism. People have absolutely no understanding of racism. I am talking about blacks as well as whites. Racism is a word which people know. However, most people haven't thought deeply about how it expresses itself in human interaction. There is always confusion between what is personal and what is universal. In every audience to which I speak, there is always someone who will stand up and say, "I do not know how you can say that Just's inability to get research funds is an indication of racism in American society. Whites also have the same difficulty." I stand there and look at the audience for a couple of minutes not saying, "You idiot!" One does not do that to an audience. I say, "Yes, but perhaps those whites who do not get research funds were not as bright as Just." The audience does not know how to answer that, and it is a flippant remark.

What I am trying to say is that the only way certain people in this country can understand racism is if everything is constant, and the thing they are dealing with is the only variable. If racism expresses itself in that arena, then they are probably willing to admit that racism is a factor. They have no way of seeing racism in a human sense as something that acts itself out around events. Now the case of Just is a very good one because Just had the same ambitions, virtues and faults as many whites. Because of this, you have to seek out his whole life in context with the lives of other whites and then compare how these things work

themselves out. Racism will always act itself out around a human event. That is why biography is so good as a way of looking at some of these things because it doesn't make any sense to talk about statistical racism. You don't understand it as a psychological force, you don't understand how it operates in society, you don't understand how people can at the same time "have black friends" and be racists. One needs to be able to understand that.

Throughout the biography, I had to fight constantly against stereotypes that have been built from the culture itself. I couldn't allow the reader to slip into his prejudices. I am always writing against the culture.

The biographer has so much information that he must constantly ask himself what to include in the biography. I remember narrating the scenes when Just's wife was in the hospital and he had to take over the domestic affairs. In the narrative, I included the fact that his maid quit and he was under a lot of pressure because he had no help. This is a piece of information that one could easily leave out. I included it because I knew there would be some of my reading audience whose eyebrows would be raised because "This man has a maid so why should I sympathize with him?!"

It is the same thing that led me to include Jacque Loeb's rather anti-Semitic remarks when he was talking about one of his proteges, a Jew, who had given a lecture at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and had overacted his role. Jacques Loeb, a socialist and NAACP supporter, made the remark, "He sounded like an Eastsider trying to sell some goods." It is important for people to see the anti-Semitism. It is that kind of thing that one puts in the narrative to keep readers on their toes.

I don't think we understand the power of biography. It is powerful in helping to shape social policy. Too often we think the only thing that shapes social policy is another statistical study of the number of welfare parents. That information will go into some file. I contend that what we are doing is extraordinarily important because it is through biography that views and ideas about society get filtered down to the level of social policymakers. If you look at the influence of books like Booker T. Washington's Up From Slavery, a lot of black biography is very, very important. Rosenwald was strongly influenced by biography. It plays a very important role.

In writing the Just biography, I clearly thought I was involved in redeeming, in keeping alive, a man whose story would have been lost to history. It is important for us to keep working and preserving these stories. I wanted to give

science and scientific enterprise a human dimension. Too often that is obscure. People do not see science as a human activity. As I got into the biography, I felt I was involved in something very basic and important to me. I wanted, in this biography, to illuminate problems of the human condition. It is true that I was looking at particular situations and a particular black subject, but I wanted to go further than that. Much of what we see and do has fundamental importance for larger questions. I hoped to unravel the tough questions in life. These are questions of life and death, good and evil, love and hate, God and religion. What ultimately determines whether a scholarly writer of biography is good is talent and his courage to keep these questions before worldwide audiences. In writing Black Apollo of Science, The Life of Ernest Everett Just, I wanted to join the group of black writers who have done just that.

WRITING WORKING CLASS BIOGRAPHY

Nell Irvin Painter is Professor of History at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has published three books, including The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South. Her new book, Standing at Armageddon: the United States, 1877-1919 is forthcoming this year from W. W. Horton.

I speak to you both as a biographer and as an historian, that is, as both a producer and consumer of the stories of individual lives. And because my interests as a consumer played a large part in my becoming a producer, I'd like to speak not only about writing working class biography, but also about the uses of biography in the writing of history.

Biography and the Writing of History

These days, historians can be divided--in a general way--between those who see themselves primarily as social scientists and those who think of themselves as part of the humanities. The social scientists, sometimes called cliometricians, count up votes, deaths, taxes, and people in various places. As in that class of cliometrics, Time on the Cross, this approach can show how many people were where, how often they got whipped, and how much money they made on the side as incentive payment. Although the sources that the authors of Time on the Cross quantified came from manuscript as well as census materials, cliometricians are generally more likely to use the census, vote counts, hospital records, tax returns, the sort of materials that exist for most people, whether they are/were rich or poor. Such materials can provide insights into the lives of people who left no narrative sources such as letters or diaries. In general, although not in the case of Time on the Cross, cliometricians have helped reduce the tyranny of the well educated--who are, for all intents and purposes the well off--in writing about the past. But statistics say little about motivation; they cannot answer the questions that begin with why or address the meaning of the figures they deduce.

Those of us who are interested in motivation and individual activity find the uses of cliometrics indispensable though limited. As an historian, I must begin by knowing how many people were doing what I'm investigating, whether it's migrating to Kansas or joining a CIO union. But knowing how representative a given person is or was does not explain the relationship between that person's experiences and culture or how rural people responded to urban conditions. Such answers come from manuscript sources, primarily letters and diaries, that present a personal narrative. Such sources provide the basis for biographies.

Biographies, the secondary building blocks of historical synthesis, are absolutely necessary for any generalizations about what people were thinking and doing at any given time. Although biographies are crucial to the work of historians, not everyone produces the manuscript sources that make biography possible. And that brings those of us who do Afro-American history face to face with the problems of class as well as race.

Class and Afro-American History

Afro-Americans who are poor are not unique in this country or any other in not having left historians very many narrative sources. Here, as in Ghana or France or India, poor people do not and did not write nearly as much as have the wealthy, and what the poor write is always much less likely to be conserved. Here, as elsewhere, manuscript collections are full of the records of the rich and powerful. While labor historians everywhere are digging hard and finding more manuscript source materials than had been thought possible twenty-five years ago, the fundamental problem of sources remains, particularly for those of us who believe that people from one class cannot automatically speak for those in another, even when both the rich and the poor face racism or sexism.

In Afro-American history, the problem becomes all the more vexatious because black people in this country were and remain a poor and working class people. The thought of a Frederick Douglass (as analyzed in a book like Waldo Martin's Mind of Frederick Douglass [1985]) clearly cannot be taken to stand for the thought of slaves who stayed in Maryland, particularly after Douglass became an abolitionist speaker and publicist. The biography of the sociologist Charles S. Johnson, were there one, would hardly illuminate the experiences of the rural people whom he studied in the 1930s. Thadious Davis's biography of Nella Larsen will show the class snobbery of the black bourgeoisie. But just as racial stereotypes indicate little about actual black people, class stereotypes also tell little about their objects as real people. Any synthesis of Afro-American history must depend on narrative sources from those who represent the vast majority of black people. As much as possible, working class blacks (like anyone) need to speak for themselves.

Working Class Biography/Autobiography

Ideally every person would sit down at some point in life, write an autobiography, and send it to an archive. But that assumes that everyone has the time to sit down and write. Most people who are not in easy financial circumstances spend most of their time working or

recuperating from working. They are unlikely to write, because leisure time in which to write is a privilege of relative wealth. And in the past, as John Steinbeck showed in Grapes of Wrath, poor people like the Joads did not necessarily carry around writing tools. Feeling at ease with what Pappa Joad called "word writing" has traditionally been a prerequisite of education, that is, of wealth. The editors of the Daily World discovered this in the early 1930s, when, touting proletarian literature, they sought to publish the creations of actual workers. Although workers and peasants might be extraordinarily eloquent in speech, their writing was often stiff and lifeless. It turned out that the best examples of proletarian literature came from gifted writers who either were people of some education or people, like Richard Wright, who spent a good deal of time (another way of speaking of money) polishing their craft.

I discovered the limitations of working class writing as literature when Hosea Hudson gave me the manuscript of his autobiography, Black Worker in the Deep South. Hudson, whose spoken word is perceptive, nuanced, and often humorous, wrote in a stilted prose style that masked the complexity and criticism of his spoken reflections on his experiences. Like many poor, uneducated people, Southerners particularly, Hudson's natural form of expression was the spoken, not the written word. He convinced me that in order to capture the wealth of intelligence of working people, speech, not writing, holds the key. Oral history, therefore, must remain at the center of working class biography. This means a collaboration between the subject and the historian. Two of the best examined examples of cooperative endeavor are, first, nineteenth-century slave narratives, often written down by white abolitionists, and second, the ex-slave narratives collected by the WPA interviewers, mostly white, in the 1930s.

Although these are the most ample and most accessible testimonies of people who had actually been slaves, their use by historians remains controversial because of the unfathomable role of the interviewer. Historians wonder whether abolitionists urged fugitives to exaggerate or dwell upon the cruelties of the peculiar institution, as they took down the narratives. In the case of the WPA narratives, one wonders about the possibility of self-censorship when ex-slaves spoke to interviewers who were sometimes the descendants of their masters. In either case, the role of the amanuensis becomes problematic.

Competing Agendas

When two people work on one project, the issue of competing agendas appears immediately, and oral historians

are divided on what constitutes the proper role of the historian/interviewer. One school of thought, embodied in the leadership of the Oral History Association some years ago, held that the interviewer merely facilitates the process of recording what the subject--here called "the historian"--wants to say. The speaker sets the agenda, expanding on what she or he wishes to dwell upon, deleting what she or he wishes to cover up. Deciding what is important is the prerogative of the speaker, who shapes the narrative alone.

This was not my approach in working with Hosea Hudson. As a social historian and consumer of biography, I sought to produce a testament that would illuminate not only Hosea Hudson's life as a Communist in Birmingham, Alabama, in the 1930s and 1940s, but also his life as a Southern industrial worker. But this is not to say that my concerns alone influenced the shape of the final product. Arnold Rampersad has written on the autobiography that lies at the heart of every biography, and his observations apply to The Narrative of Hosea Hudson. But I think that the book is richer for combining the interests of the biographer--an evocation of life and times--with those of the autobiographer, in this case, the vindication of CPUSA in the South.

This approach is not unambiguously positive, however, for combining the concerns of a working class person with those of an educated person risks contaminating working class autobiography with a middle class perspective. On balance, I would say that this is not simply a contamination of class but one inherent in the very act of writing biography. Virtually by definition, biographers are people of education and economic privilege, at least in comparison with working class subjects. What I have called contamination might also be termed critical distance, which is a fundamental strength of biography, as opposed to autobiography. But it is a special sort of distance that anyone writing about a subject who has suffered the injuries of class, race, sex, or sexual orientation needs to examine self-consciously.

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND BLACK BIOGRAPHY

Arnold Rampersad is Professor of English at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. He is author of The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. DuBois. Dr. Rampersad, the official biographer of Langston Hughes, has published The Life of Langston Hughes, Volume I: 1902-1941. Volume II will be published in September of 1988.

In one of the finest Afro-American novels written since the war, John A. Williams' Sissie, a black man, Ralph, talks to a white psychiatrist, Dr. Bluman. After some verbal fencing at their first meeting, the doctor asks:

"Can we get started now?"

"I feel a little awkward about this," Ralph said.

"Ummm, yes?" Bluman gave Ralph an interested, open look.

"I feel a little defeated too"--Ralph turned his eyes quickly toward the doctor.--"I mean, finding it necessary to come here."

"Why did you find it necessary?". . .Bluman's eyes twinkled. He waited this time.

I'm out of dreams. . . .I'm at a dead end--" He broke off, thinking with a sudden suspicion that even his speech patterns would be under analysis here.

Many of us, faced with the psychoanalytical method, not to mention a psychiatrist, respond as Ralph did: We "feel a little defeated . . . finding it necessary to come here." My aim here is fairly modest: to look at the field of black biography--by which I mean the biographies of black Americans by anyone--and to try to determine the extent to which books in the field have been influenced by, or have taken into account, the insights, discoveries, and methods of psychologists. If biographies of blacks have not been so influenced to a marked degree, should they be? And what are the major problems and difficulties involved in the incorporation of the psychoanalytic approach in the field in general? Then, to bring the whole business down to earth, I would also like to refer briefly to my own experience as a would-be biographer of Langston Hughes, in an attempt to illustrate some of the main factors at work.

I believe it is fair to say that, far from being influenced by psychoanalysis, black biography has kept a vast distance between itself and that discipline; if one looks at even the most acclaimed books in the field, one sees hardly any attempts to link the art of biography to the science of psychoanalysis. Methodologically, in so far as black biography is concerned, we have really not advanced beyond Du

Bois's historic psychological description of the American black in the The Souls of Black Folks--the famed description of a divided consciousness, of the two souls, one African, the other American, at war with one another in a single dark body, with only the greatest effort preventing the mind from being torn apart in the tug-of-war. As biographers, we have hardly reached Du Bois's second significant formulation or description of the black mind--or of a mind like his own--which came in his autobiography Dusk of Dawn (1940). The passage begins: "It is difficult to let others see the full psychological meaning of caste segregation. It is as though one, looking out from a dark cave in a side of an impending mountain, sees the world passing and speaks to it; speaks courteously and persuasively. . . . One talks on evenly and logically in this way, but notices that the passing throng does not even turn its head, or if it does, glances curiously and walks on. It gradually penetrates the minds of the prisoners that the people passing do not hear; that some thick sheet of invisible but horribly tangible plate glass is between them and the world. They get excited; they talk louder; they gesticulate." Then some may become "hysterical. They may scream and hurl themselves against the barriers. . . . They may even, here and there, break through in blood and disfigurement, and find themselves faced by a horrified, implacable, and quite overwhelming mob of people frightened for their own very existence."

To repeat myself: I don't believe that our biographers have moved in psychological terms past Du Bois's image of the two souls to Du Bois's image of the plate glass between the races. And it goes without saying that the latter image, published in 1940, has been superceded by psychology itself. Our biographers have thus lagged far behind our artists--a fact that should not be news to anyone. Some years ago I suggested that all of Afro-American literature has come out of The Souls of Black Folk--and most precisely from Du Bois's image of the divided souls. I would add that the greatest of post-war black fiction, notably that of Richard Wright and Ellison (Richard Wright of "The Man Who Lived Underground" and Ellison's Invisible Man), had as their antecedent Du Bois's image of the plate glass and the invisible, increasingly enraged black who smashes his way out. Wright, unlike our biographers--indeed, unlike even his biographers--had a deep interest in psychiatry, which sprang from his own relationship with Dr. Frederic Wertham (author of "An Unconscious Determinant in Native Son," first published in Journal of Clinical and Experimental Psychology in July 1944). This relationship led to Wright's deep interest thereafter in psychiatry, to his help in setting up the first psychiatric clinic in Harlem, and to his novel Savage Holiday, which is explicitly psychiatric in its approach.

If one goes beyond post war fiction, one sees in at least one place--John A. Williams's Sissie, with which I started this talk--the novelist unafraid to take psychiatry seriously, and in its most proper, clinical form. The truth is that some of our best artists have forged ahead in their interest in psychology--while their biographers have lagged behind. One suspects, too, that several of our leading artists have been at the very least through psychotherapy. Certainly I could think of more than one who should submit at once to psychiatry.

Clearly there are difficulties in the way of a perfect link between psychology and biography. Take Du Bois, for example. In The Souls of Black Folk, which is about a people, he borrowed the concept of "double consciousness" from psychology, or what passed for it in its dawn. Nevertheless, this concept was not twenty years old--a short time, in academic and intellectual terms--when Du Bois adapted it from William James and his colleagues. But Du Bois did not see fit to make a similar appeal to psychology when he himself became a biographer in his John Brown, published six years later. There he fell back on hoary methodology--the historian Hypolite Taine's pseudo-scientific notion that the great determinant factor in the emergence of a leader is the trio of race, milieu, and moment. Du Bois used this approach to explain the mind of man who, pretty clearly, according to even his own brother, was crazy at least part of the time. Du Bois's disloyalty to psychology was unfortunate. Double-consciousness, as a term, enters the human mind; race, milieu, and moment are as external as dialectical materialism, for example, in explaining it--not completely invalid, not impossible of insight, but nevertheless inherently external, one might say, to the working of the mind.

One recent book by a black literateur turned veteran social scientist has addressed this problem directly (in fact, apart from the black historian Earl Thorpe's efforts in psychohistory, I don't know of anyone else who has come close to the subject). That book is by the late Allison Davis: Leadership, Love, and Aggression, published by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1983. In attempting four distinct psychological studies, of Frederick Douglass, Du Bois, Richard Wright, and Martin Luther King, Jr., Davis does not conceal his hostility to most of their biographers. On Douglass: "None of his biographers has studied the central paradox in Douglass's personality--the conflicting hatred and love for a powerful father who treated him as a son at times, but never emancipated or publicly acknowledged him. Only Dr. Stephen Weissman, in a short article, has explored this early, ambivalent bond." And later: "from the ages of seven to fifteen he had been reared by Sophia Auld and loved by her

as her own son. It seems extraordinary that his biographers have ignored so central a fact in his emotional life and identity development." On Du Bois: "He was an enigma to friends as well as to enemies. Faced with his inscrutability, his biographers have dealt only with symptoms." On Wright ("the angriest, and yet the most influential of all black writers"): Michel Fabre, the leading Wright scholar and author of the biography The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright (1973) is "a man of good intentions but of incredible naivete both about black life in Mississippi and about the psychology of personality. [Fabre] is not equipped to deal with Wright's basic emotional development. He has no knowledge whatever of Wright's basic emotional conflicts, and apparently no interest in learning their continual working in his behavior, his fantasies, and his writing." On King, no such direct attack is mounted, but we may infer Davis's sense of the inadequacy of King's biographers by noting that the books he praises most for an understanding of King were written by King's widow and by a man who lived with the family for many years: Coretta Scott King's My Life with Martin Luther King, Jr. (1969) and L.D. Reddick's 1959 study Crusader Without Violence: A Biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. (All other biographers have depended upon Reddick's book for a knowledge of King's first thirty years).

As far as I can tell, Davis's book is the first to attempt a psychoanalytical reading of black leaders. If it isn't required reading for any other reason, it should be for that reason; a published psychological study of a black leader is an act of courage in itself--so entrenched is the opposition to such work. The fear of theory runs deep, as I found out some years ago when after a mildly Freudian analysis of an aspect of Langston Hughes, I was publicly rebuked by two senior black scholars--one who asserted that his only interest was in the work, not the life, and another who urged me to leave Freud alone and instead consult the African gods for my insights. To the former, I protested that biography is about the life first and foremost; to the latter I wanted to say that, among other things, I found his statement positively Olympian.

Davis's model in Leadership, Love, and Aggression is more than mildly Freudian; it is strongly so. Originating in a paper first delivered before a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, it depends heavily on Freud's discussions of aggression, which takes many forms, of which anger is "the simplest, most normal." It distinguishes between "realistic anger" and the nourishment of resentment, most often by the the conflict between "the wish to be loved and an angry desire to avenge a lack of love." The manner of handling aggression falls into three basic types: sadistic,

masochistic, and affiliative, or "reality-oriented." Davis cites Freud's "War and Death" on the closeness between the human desire to kill and the drive to love; anger must be vented or it will destroy. He also cites Freud's "On Narcissism": "In the last resort we must begin to love in order that we may not fall ill, and must fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we cannot love."

Davis's book received scant attention. As far as I can tell, it went unnoticed by the New York Times; no literary journal reviewed it. To some extent, this treatment was deserved. For example, Davis undertook to discuss Martin Luther King, Jr.'s toilet training without, to say the least, sufficient evidence. And in treating Richard Wright, he defied the evidence that the autobiography Black Boy was in many ways a manipulation of the facts of Wright's life, and quotes Wright's words there as evidence of the truth. Thus he takes it as a fact that Wright was reared in "a clan of obsessively religious and sadistic women," in "a family of infinite sadistic inventiveness." "I have never read," Davis writes without irony, "of so violent a clan of women." On the other hand, it was on something akin to firsthand experience that Davis declares of Wright that "he never enjoyed life among Negroes," and on grounds justifiable by an intelligent reading of Wright's work--although asserted by none of his biographers--that Davis asserts that "Wright hated blacks as deeply as whites did."

At least two of the few reviews of Leadership, Love, and Aggression were wildly contradictory. One, in the Library Journal, thought the book "not likely to change history's view of these men." On the other hand, the School Library Journal thought it filled "a giant gap in the knowledge and understanding of these men." The latter may be overstated, but I think it errs, if it errs, in the right direction. To those who say that to impose Freud on the black mind is to extend European hegemony over blacks I would answer, first, that any analysis is better than none, and anti-Freudian blacks have offered no counter system or anti-system worthy of the name; secondly, that the Freud-Erikson model does not so much declare itself as final truth as it raises questions of enormous value to ourselves. We need to remember, in examining our reservations about psychiatry and psychobiography, that as scholars we have no real hope of reconstituting the past, and therefore should have no immobilizing fear of completely misrepresenting it. We investigate and recreate the past, ultimately, in order to understand better our own lives and society. For that reason alone, we should proceed with less caution.

In his essay on King, for example, Davis's burden is to uncover how King was able to turn hate into affiliative love.

If one does not make this psychiatrically inspired attempt, fraught with danger as it is, the consequences can range from simple dullness as a biographer to a range of error--the greatest of which would be to suppose that such a turning of hate into love is really impossible, and that the love-gestures of King were superficial and strategic, like the advertising campaigns of our ambitious, image building politicians. We need to approach our leaders not with reverence for them but with a degree of reverence for complex methodology--or at the very least without the primitive fear of complex methodology that assails many of us. (One of the great ironies here is that, as Davis points out, the most anti-intellectual black position, that of the extreme cultural nationalists, was most effectively fueled by a psychiatrist, Franz Fanon, notably in his Wretched of the Earth.)

In King's case, as seen by Davis, psychology reinforces our sense of his goodness by demonstrating that which made him good to the point of greatness was psychologically possible. In the case of Du Bois, the observation is different. Du Bois is seen as the grand crusader that he was, but the will to crusade is linked to the force of aggression within him, and to his almost impenetrable loneliness, and his fear of women, and his early fear of illegitimacy, and his guilt over the fact, which I think Davis infers brilliantly, that Du Bois hated his mother for, among other things, his fear of the stigma of illegitimacy, and then was guilt ridden over his hatred. I mention Davis's treatment of Du Bois and King to underscore a point--that politics are involved, or a basic position concerning power and people. Freudian psychology is conciliatory and integrationist; I hasten to add that I do not think it, for that reason, sinister. Neither does Davis. And it is not necessarily authoritarian as a methodology. Davis prizes King's reconciling quality of forgiveness and love over Du Bois scourging hatred, but he is never so haughty or so foolish as to ignore the fact that Du Bois was an extraordinary force for good in the history of black America.

One recent book on black American literature, it seems to me, illustrates both the opportunity for fresh insight and the dangers afforded by psychoanalysis. I refer to Michael Cooke's Afro-American Literature in the Twentieth Century: The achievement of intimacy (1985). Mr. Cooke sees four steps in the unfolding of black literature. First is "self-veiling," marked by an unassertive, undemanding adaptation to the environment. . . . Its motive--to survive is positive, but its vision limited." Second is "solitude," "in which the black character stands out from the veil and survives, but survives without sustaining or amplifying connections." The third is "kinship," when "relationships

come into play, as the conditions of life become ampler and more varied"; but the enrichment comes "without relief" and the literature cannot escape a sense of "something deliberate, rather than fluent, and defensive, rather than spontaneous." Last of all is "intimacy," marked by "an openness towards the turns of inner life as well as the force of things without, and by a conviction of being at home in any dimension of the human experience." Robert Hayden's poetry and Alice Walker's Meridian exemplify the latter. James Baldwin and Ishmael Reed, on the other hand, stand for "tragic and ironic denials of intimacy." Another evolving stage is "beyond intimacy," marked by a kind of full scale plunging into black experience, "axiomatic and comprehensive," as opposed to the black experience, which is called "dogmatic and political."

What we have here surely, although Cooke does not say so, is an adaptation of Erik Erikson, the most influential and effective of the Freud-based biographer-psychologists, and his eight stages of human development: trust (learned at the breast), autonomy (toilet training, control of the anus), initiative, industry, identity (the sum of all previous identities, intimacy (the ability to love and surrender in love), generate, and integrity. There are many fine things about Professor Cooke's book, but I would like to point here to the most questionable aspect. Clearly literature improves, as far as he is concerned, as the text proposes more advanced human development. But something is obviously wrong with any scheme that proposes Robert Hayden's poetry, fine as it is, or Alice Walker's Meridian, at the summit of black literature. One cannot evaluate writers according to our sense of their state of mental health, with the palms going to those writers whose works suggest temperamental and intellectual calm and pliability, together with integrationist politics. In other words, the danger in his argument lies in its linear and progressive elements. Allison Davis ends by praising each of his four leaders for what they achieved; he had tried to explain the contours of their behavior, its origin and development, and not to see them in some scale of evolution. No doubt he clearly admires most of all the apostle of love, Martin Luther King, Jr., who reflects Cooke's and Erikson's stage of intimacy and Erikson's generativity and integrity. But King was also by far the most influential and successful of the four men (Douglass, Du Bois, Wright, and King) as a leader; Davis does not say, however, that King's speeches or writings were superior to those of the others because of his greater psychological maturity.

Why has black biography been so wary of psychoanalysis? The answers are many. A prejudice exists against psychoanalysis--ironically not unlike the prejudice against

biography itself. But are there reasons peculiar to black culture? One reason could be that so many of the biographers of blacks (including some of the best biographers) are white, and write under constraints in the more intimate areas of their subjects' lives. But black scholars are really no more brave than their white counterparts. They, too, are often timid in the face of the potential black readership. Additionally, many undoubtedly feel the overriding need, in a racist national culture, to keep black heroes scrubbed and shining and heroic, and to conceal any evidence that may "tarnish" their reputations.

For myself, I find that I share the general suspicion of psychoanalysis in biography that I write myself. Recently, a friend who has read a large part of my biography of Hughes in manuscript form, and also read an essay of mine on "The Origins of Poetry in Langston Hughes," published in the Southern Review, expressed bewilderment at the difference of approach between the two. Not only was the latter--the essay--written at a more intense pitch than was the biography itself, but it seemed to be more "intellectual." In the essay, I wrote of a contest between will and passivity in Hughes, springing out of anger and a sense of isolation, on one hand, and a desire for a stasis like death on the other; I tried to argue that Hughes's poetry often showed the flaring of one or the other of these polar oppositions, but that his best work marked a compromise between the two because of the annealing context of the black race, which had entered into the boy's consciousness in lieu of his parents.

I don't believe that in my biographical work I ever write boldly about such factors as will and passivity. I would hesitate to write about neurosis and aggression--although I may betray a literary weakness for guilt and shame. (One of the shocks of my life was the moment I saw guilt described casually, as if it were self-evident, as "aggression against the self.") Why am I so reticent as a biographer? Biography, it seems to me is an art in so far as it encourages genuine story telling, and not many tales would survive the introduction of terminology borrowed from the sciences. Those tales that survive easiest are science fiction, which depends on scientific terminology; which is perhaps why so many explicitly psychoanalytical biographies read like--science fiction.

Where does this leave us? I don't think it leaves us ignoring psychology. Rather, we have the burden of recognizing the validity of psychology and of using its methods to understand our subject; then we have to translate those insights into a language appropriate to our discipline. In the process, something will be lost and the room for error is potentially great. But we really have no choice in the

matter. Let me end with a suggestion and then two observations.

Just as a psychiatrist must go through analysis in order to be certified, perhaps it should be the case that no one should attempt the biography of an artist, and perhaps the biography of anyone, if the aim is serious biography, without having become acquainted, in some form, with the basic psychoanalytical methods.

Also, the fear of the political consequences of psychiatry and psychoanalysis needs to be reexamined. What we may fear from a political point of view is only the American version of Freud. As Sherry Turkel has pointed out in Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution (1978), while American psychiatry has maintained itself historically as the antithesis of progressive politics, or of politics at all, in recent years the French overcame their historic hostility to Freud and underwent a kind of conversion experience and a reinterpretation of Freud that have made his teachings (mainly through the work of Jacques Lacan) not only compatible with socialism and feminism, for example, but a prime source of inspiration to both movements (one may see Fanon's work as part of this process).

And lastly, as biographers of blacks we should not forget the simple truth that being a Negro or Colored or even a Black in America is above all a psychological state. I believe that the effects of direct racism on the personality is trivial and relatively powerless compared to its indirect effects, which can be crippling; the damage of racism is often done long before someone is finally called a "nigger." Thus one explains very little as a biographer if one does not attempt to explain the mind, and do--in the absence of a rival model--so according to some model derived, as Erik Erikson's and, derivatively, Allison Davis's are, from the works of Freud.

BLACK BIOGRAPHY COMPARED TO WHITE

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Biography by its very nature implies that the subject of such work is famous, infamous, unusual, out of the ordinary, interesting. The biography should tell us something not only of the person, but his physical and historical place, his friends and enemies, his neighbors and so on. Reading biographies should be enlightening for they serve to tell us things about ourselves as well as the subject.

This should hold true for the biographies of all kinds of people, but it does not. About ten years ago, as an example of the problem of the black biography, I suggested to a publisher and a good friend that he should contract me to begin a biography of Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. He said he did not think anyone would be interested in such a work.

This same publisher, however, in the 1960s, had published Yes I Can, a work that was said to be the biography of Sammy Davis, Jr. The basic problem with writing black biographies is that 1) such work attracts only scholars if the subject is or has been an artist, and 2) if the subjects are not artists, but athletes and entertainers, the contract to write the biographies, more often than not, will be let to white, rather than black writers. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, perhaps most specifically in the cases of Richard Wright, Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King, Jr. I have two quibbles with this arrangement, which I do not see undergoing any change. The first is that in many cases, not all, some flavor gets lost when biography crosses ethnic lines, and what is lost is often not even noticed because most readers of books are white and therefore cannot know what has been lost. The writing may be great, but essences are not. There are not many comparisons to be found to prove this thesis, for reasons already stated. I would like to be able to compare Henri Troyat's Pushkin to John O. Killens' Pushkin, but Killens' book has not been published, though it has been on the market for years. We may never get to read Margaret Walkers' The Daemonic Genius of Richard Wright, whatever faults we may find, because it may never be published, at least by the house that for so long was contracted to do so. The fault for this sorry situation has been laid by Walker at the feet of Wright's widow. Walker's book could send us back to Webb and Fabre and a host of other authors, most white, who have done work on Wright.

The other quibble I have, and which may be out of place in this august gathering, is perhaps in the short and long run equally important. When a black subject, alive, of course, allows a publisher to contract with a white writer to do his biography, the flow of money is from black (subject) to white (biographer and publisher). None of it finds its way into what may constitute a black community simply because in the middle link in this chain of literary economics there is no black biographer. I grant you that in the case of works on people like Dick Gregory, Sammy Davis Jr., Wilt Chamberlain, Charlie Parker, Bricktop or Billie Holliday, the books tend to be more "pop" than biographical. But, clearly, more money is involved with works like these than with, say, Kenneth Manning's Black Apollo of Science, The Life of Ernest Everett Just.

Those quibbles aside, I think it may be generally accepted here that the most serious problem of the black biography is the one I began this talk with: not many people care about the lives of great black figures, a situation that cannot surprise us at this point in our history. This gives rise to self-censorship on the part of would-be black biographers, for they too, must eat. I place scholars in a slightly different situation here, for, if they are black and moving up the mountain to a doctorate, their advisors more often than not prefer that they do their dissertations on people just like themselves. (At the same time, we know, they will thoroughly discourage efforts by white students to do advanced work on minority literary figures.)

A related aspect of self-censorship is the sense among subjects and/or their survivors, that the utilization of a white writer by a white publisher (is there any other kind, really?) will make for a more solid work, a better distributed and therefore more widely read work. Therefore, it seems to me, that among black subjects there exists a preference for what my mother often calls "the other persuasion." And publishers, I believe, think essentially the same way.

The program lists me as the author of biographies on Martin Luther King, Jr. and Richard Pryor, a work that is unpublished, though it was contracted for. More accurately these two books and the young adult book on Richard Wright, The Most Native of Sons, are studies. I am not wealthy enough to be a biographer. It takes a wealth of time and money and care and love to be a good biographer; in the case of black biography, I think it also takes a sustained sense of indignation and pure, unadulterated dedication. One perceives this, layer upon layer of this, in Kenneth Manning's book. So my works that approach this genre are "studies," which may be considered work more in depth than a

reporter would do, but certainly less than a certified biographer must do. Still, none of these three would I consider "pop" books, rather, I think they fill a void over which a biographer can build a fortress.

Let me share some of the experiences I had with these books, experiences that made me know that I was still more reporter than biographer. My experience with Ellen Wright with The Most Native of Sons, indicated that anyone doing work on Wright was going to have problems with that lady. She assumed that I had to clear the writing of and the publication of the book with her. She was quite furious when she learned that the book was coming out. The strange thing was that I had told her about the book in Paris the year before. Michel Fabre's book was, to my knowledge, the only work she approved of on her late husband. Anyway, The Most Native of Sons was a short study with emphasis on writing and not politics and certainly not on sex, which I hear, was to be heavily suggested in Walker's book, and which was curiously implied in Volume One of Chester Himes' autobiography, The Quality of Hurt.

The King God Didn't Save was published in 1970 and everyone under the sun threatened to sue me -- but they didn't. People accused me of being in cahoots with the FBI. One such person was Jesse Jackson using Jet as the medium through which he made the charge. My lawyer demanded a retraction from both or face a libel suit and, unfortunately, a long retraction appeared in the very next issue. I say unfortunately, because I could have been a rich man today if Jet had not retracted.

I was amazed, but not terribly, to discover the extent to which the press itself was in cahoots with the stories the FBI was putting out about King's private life. To my knowledge, only one reporter, Mike Royko in Chicago, ever refused to look at FBI photos or listen to FBI tapes. Both black and white press were in on the deal. I pointed out to a friend at Jet that the magazine had done only one single story on King's campaign in Chicago and I wondered why. Some of the biggest "liberal" names in the media had listened to those tapes. If you're around when my son does my biography, you'll find out who they are or were. People told me things that they should have qualified with the phrases "off the record" or "on background." I think none ever did because they didn't take me seriously -- even those who had every right to do so. Many of my contacts were women who had married by the time I was writing the book. Because I had reason not to trust my telephone and because they, of course, did not want their husbands to know about their relationships with King, those interviews that were not conducted in person were done from a phone booth at very specific times. I

didn't use any of these names, of course, and the reviewers thus had an excuse to theorize that the people didn't exist. When the threats to sue were being announced in the press on the average of once a week, a friend called. He'd worked in Adam Clayton Powell's office in Washington. "Don't worry about a thing," he said. "If they make a move, you let us know." After about three years things died down, but there had been some heavy assaults on my psyche. I still feel today that a black leader, given the innate puritanism of America, in spite of the proliferation of T&A television shows and soft porn films, must be seen to be more pure than the purest angel. It is an unreasonable demand, but this is an unreasonable society. The problem with this study was that it made both black and white angry and few tried to see what was actually being said in many places in the book. "Positively Black" tried to ban me from a show on which I was scheduled, and I screamed and yelled, "First Amendment!" and they caved in. We had a good show. The host, Gene Callender, hadn't even read the book. He'd only heard about it.

My first attempt to do a study of a "Personality" was with Stevie Wonder. A publisher set up the deal and Stevie's lawyer came to New York to work out details. With my son who was then working in Los Angeles, we went to a Hollywood club to meet with Stevie. I had years ago lived out there and knew what Hollywood does to people, and I have to confess that I was looking more at the money involved than the reality of things. We waited an hour. Then Abner, the president of Motown showed up wearing a dashiki that must have cost a thousand dollars. He had with him some library copies of some of my books which he wanted autographed. With his group were men who were carrying vinyl cases and who took up positions beside each and every exit. Then Stevie showed up with his brother and another group from which another band of men carrying cases also took up position at the exits. It seemed there was a feud in the company. After several failures of the Motown lawyer to deliver Stevie for interviews, I gave up, told the publisher it was a waste of time for me. Frankly, I just didn't want to spend my time running after celebrities. I didn't think any money was worth that.

Richard Pryor was a different case. I thought he was the funniest MF to come down the pike in a long time. He was barbershop, locker room, street corner and rapping with your best buddy all rolled into one. It was my idea to do a study on him and I sold it finally to an editor who had lived and worked in Hollywood. Most of the New York types weren't interested.

There was an assumption (which I didn't bother to correct) that people in Hollywood read books and that

certainly Richard Pryor had read mine. We never got together to find out, though I traveled to California several times -- which meant I got to see my mother more frequently than is usual -- and to Peoria a couple of times, which is like going nowhere at all. But it is difficult to get hold of records in Illinois, and almost no problem at all to get them in California, and Pryor's left a paper trail from one end of the country to another. Although I wrote a study of over 300 pages, I did not interview Pryor and not many people who were close to him.

There is great fear in Hollywood. Many, many people I interviewed wanted to change their copy when I sent it to them for verification when the book was finished. Jim Brown wouldn't talk to me: when Pryor kicked him out of his new company, I had no interest in talking to Jim. Bill Cosby in 1970 had told me about an incident in Las Vegas with Pryor. I kept reading about this in various articles, but each was slightly different. The incident resulted in Pryor's not ever playing in Las Vegas -- and he hasn't -- literally on pain of disappearance. It was Cosby who was instrumental in preventing Pryor's untimely disappearance.

There was the question of dope and dope use. Pryor was the biggest walking, talking advertisement for staying high on dope ever; Madison Avenue couldn't have dreamed him up. Yet, he was never busted on a serious dope charge. And there remains some question as to who precisely was with him the night he said he burned himself up. This was a tough study to do and because it was, I hired private detectives and researchers from one end of the country to the other. Biographers may hire researchers; do they hire detectives?

Enough gossip. I thought Pryor and I were suitable for marriage, but we couldn't find a preacher, in this case, a publisher. Jim Haskins who did publish a book on Pryor found a small house that did not serve him well, but Jim's book was more "pop" than "study," as I believe mine to be. Yet, at last count there were three other books, what we call "cut and paste" books, by white authors, two of which are abominations, that are still available. Don't ask why, because the answer has already been provided.

PLUGGED IN, TURNED ON, AND POWERED UP:
WRITING BLACK BIOGRAPHY IN THE 1980S

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In the 1960s, Timothy J. Leary counseled Baby Boomers to "Tune in, turn on, and drop out." Experiencing drug-induced bursts of color was both the fashion and the norm. A wag might argue that the equivalent phenomenon in the high-tech 1980s would be staring fixedly at a brightly colored monitor as Pacman gobbles his way across the screen. What self-respecting hippie would (unless stoned) have feigned ignorance of the chemical effects of marijuana, and, conversely, would a yuppie worthy of the name admit to being computer illiterate? To state the matter another way (as academics are wont to do), has the electronic high replaced the psychedelic? And is the current fascination with microcomputers rooted in function or fashion?

Both questions, even if one were to take them seriously, are moot for writers and publishers in the 1980s. The factors that have led so many of us to become computer literate--in my own case, computer passionate--are not especially germane. The bottom line is that, like them, dislike them; embrace them, reject them, computers are the engines powering today's print media. The age of electronic writing and publishing exists, and it is necessary that humanists and social scientists both understand the role that the computer currently plays and help to shape its future.

I address the subject of the electronic authorship of biographies as one who has done a modest amount of biographical research and has had extensive experience as a word processor, the teacher of a course in microcomputer applications for students of language and literature, and the editor of a scholarly journal (Black American Literature Forum) which is copyedited on and typeset by computer. The remarks that follow address a variety of issues affecting the scholar/author, especially the biographer, and include consideration of the seminal role that the microcomputer plays in the publishing process. Wittingly or not, many people writing with a word processor are doing the bulk of the typesetting for their books and essays: magazine and book publishers are beginning to make use of the magnetically encoded, machine-readable text files created by their contributors.

Because most writers who compose electronically use microcomputers rather than mainframes or minicomputers, I have, for the most part, limited my discussion to microcomputer usage. Moreover, because IBM personal

computers (preeminently the PC, PC/XT, and PC/AT), along with other machines that operate under PC/MS-DOS, account for over half of the microcomputers currently in use in American offices, I tend, when discussing software, to consider programs that run on IBM PCs and PC-compatibles. The points I am making, however, apply more or less equally to all computing systems.

Reach Out and Touch a Library

Increasingly, libraries are coming on-line; that is, the list of a library's holdings is stored in the memory bank of a computer, which may rapidly be accessed from a remote terminal. Moreover, many research databases that contain references to biographical material are available for on-line searching. Among them are Historical Abstracts, American History and Life, the Arts & Humanities Citation Index, and the Modern Language Association's annual Bibliography.¹ One can, of course, continue to use the bound volumes of these familiar reference tools in lieu of conducting an electronic search. Some people find leafing through card catalogues preferable to accessing a library's collection electronically. However, computerized searches can reduce the drudgery of citation gathering, and they sometimes permit the researcher to uncover items which he or she might overlook in a manual search.²

Computerized searching also offers advantages for those unable or unwilling to go to a library to gather citations. By attaching a peripheral device known as a modem to one's office or home computer, it is possible to access an on-line library or research database using the phone lines. Library patrons who have learned to carry out electronic searches on the OCLC (On-Line Computer Library Center) network or on RLIN (Research Libraries Information Network) will find that searching a local library's on-line holdings is extremely simple. And it is certainly worth the price of a longdistance call to search the holdings of a library some distance away which may or may not have materials you need to locate. Television ads no doubt exaggerate the pleasure of reaching out to touch someone by phone, but dialing a research library is faster, cheaper, and less frustrating than traveling there only to learn that you've wasted a trip.

Conversely, those wishing to gather information from a research database through a subscription network would be well-advised to leave the dialing to a librarian specially trained in the searching logic on-line database use requires. Learning to conduct an on-line search while paying connection charges of \$60 or more an hour, plus long distance phone costs, is unnecessarily nerve-racking.

Scribble, Scribble, Scribble

The principal advantages that word-processing software offers those of us afflicted with what Juvenal called "the itch to scribble" are well-known and widely documented. Insertions and deletions may be made effortlessly; reorganization is easily effected; and the retyping of drafts is eliminated. Some of the more robust word-processing programs also permit the rapid, and extremely accurate, generation of indexes. That word-processing software is important to today's writer is beyond debate. What I would like to consider here are the kinds of authoring software that best serve the needs of the biographer.

Researchers gather a copious amount of information before they begin to write. Traditionally, such data resided on notecards; today, authors may enter notes into text files on the computer. The biographer, in addition to investigating library sources, is likely to record numerous conversations with those who knew the subject of the biography, and these, following transcription, are likely to be entered into text files on the computer as well. Many researchers in the humanities and social sciences, then, but especially biographers, could make use of a program that would permit them to build a free-form, text-oriented database which could easily and rapidly be accessed and searched in conjunction with their word processor.

Unfortunately, most database software is not text-oriented. Mainframe and minicomputer users can avail themselves of such programs as Infodata's Inquire/Text and Batelle Software's Basis, which are capable of performing sophisticated, and in some cases automated, searches on literally millions of records.³ Database programs designed for microcomputers, however, tend to impose rigid limitations on text. A notable exception is FYI, Inc.'s FYI 3000, which Dragonfly Software recently brought together with an implementation of XyQuest Corporation's extremely powerful XyWrite II in order to create Nota Bene. The result is a happy marriage between a full-featured (though difficult to learn) word processor and a free-form, text-oriented database management system. Thankfully, software developer Steve Siebert, who presided over the match, understands the needs of academic writers.

After creating a text file of notes, the maximum length of which is determined by one's disk storage capacity, the user of Nota Bene runs a program that automatically indexes every word within the file (except those words which one elects to exclude). The "text-base" thus created can be accessed from within the word processor with blinding speed and can be searched either by a single keyword or by pairs of

keywords, using Boolean logic (that is, Keyword A and Keyword B, Keyword A or Keyword B, or Keyword A but not Keyword B). Because utilizing this very impressive function produces significant storage overhead, those wishing to make extensive use of Nota Bene's text-base feature might require access to a machine with a hard-disk drive or other high-capacity storage medium. (An extremely long note file of about 180K bytes would, when transformed into a text-base, become three files totaling roughly 415K bytes--a size too large to fit on a 5.25-inch double-sided, double-density floppy diskette.)

Below, I will discuss the importance of a word processor's being able to create multiple "windows"; suffice it to say here that Nota Bene's windowing system is very good, allowing one to split the screen horizontally or vertically or to toggle back and forth between two documents on separate screens. Nota Bene's ability to support foreign-language characters on the screen and send them to a printer is exemplary. Expensive, tedious to install, somewhat slow to load, difficult to use, but exceptionally fast-operating and full-featured, Nota Bene will not be everyone's favorite authoring system, but its text-base capability, in particular, may make learning to harness its power worthwhile.

Both SSI Software's Word Perfect and Microsoft's Word are easier to learn and use than is Nota Bene; both have better manuals and tutorials; both have more diverse printer support (although Nota Bene is acceptable in this regard); both support foreign-language characters; and both do windows. All three programs permit book authors to generate an index with relative ease. Unfortunately, neither Word Perfect nor Word has text-base capability, so let me explore alternatives for those who need regularly to access information in a text file outside the one they're composing.

Since almost any word processor allows the user to search for a specific word or phrase within an open (i.e., displayed, usable) text file, one could, lacking a database function, create a text file of notes and simply search that file for a particular date, name, or other keyword. The search would be relatively slow, and the user could not employ the and, or, and not pairings characteristic of Boolean logic, but the desired data could be located at a speed that many would find acceptable. Many word processors, however, do not provide a simple means of copying data, once it is located, out of one text file and into the text file being composed. If a word-processing program permits only one file to be open at a time, the user cannot pause while writing a document, open and search a second document, retrieve wanted notes, merge them into the main document, and continue to write. One of the strengths of programs like

Word Perfect and Word (and Nota Bene) is that they permit two text files to be open simultaneously, and through the use of windows, they provide the user with an easy means of passing information back and forth between two documents.

Word Perfect has two windowing options. The first allows the user to split the screen horizontally, permitting one file to be open on the upper portion of the screen while another is open below. The user can scroll through each portion of the screen independently and move or copy data readily from one document to the other. A second option permits the user to open two full-height screens and instantaneously toggle back and forth between them. Were a writer dealing with a book chapter and a file of brief notes, the split-screen option would provide sufficient space within which to work. However, one dealing with notes of substantial length might prefer to use the two-screen method. Word allows between one and eight files to be open simultaneously, but because they must be displayed on a single screen split horizontally and/or vertically, it is impractical to open more than a pair of text files. Toggling back and forth between two full-height screens is not permitted in Word.

Thus, while both Word Perfect and Word lack the textbase function and Boolean searching capabilities that distinguish Nota Bene, both programs permit writers relatively smooth access to a set of electronically prepared notes without forcing them to temporarily leave the text of the book or essay being composed. Moreover, those requiring searches among one or many note files can bring speed and the power of Boolean searching to their word processor by using it in conjunction with a program like FYI 3000 or ZyLAB Corporation's ZyIndex 2.⁴

Many word-processing programs, including MicroPro's venerable WordStar, do not allow windowing. Information can be passed from one file to the next, but only by closing the file in use, entering a second, writing the passage to be transferred to disk, closing the second file, reopening the first, locating the place where the insertion is to be made, reading in the contents of the holding file, deleting the holding file or leaving it around to clutter up the disk, and continuing. This is hardly satisfactory. The biographer who intends to use electronically stored notes in lieu of, or as a supplement to, more traditional forms of notetaking needs a word-processing program that will permit easy access to those notes.

The Brave New World of Electronic Typesetting

While it is difficult to overstate the impact that the computer has had on the practices of writing and research, the computer's impact on the publishing industry has been even greater. Most printed text currently being distributed in this country has been electronically typeset, and increasingly publishers will be seeking to be, indeed insisting that they be, provided with electronic as well as "hard" (i.e., printed out) copy of the manuscripts they are to publish. That this makes good economic sense is obvious: Why pay to have a manuscript keyboarded when the author can provide this service? For university presses and academic journals, in particular, receiving electronic copy may spell salvation from the dizzying escalation of production costs. Whether a thousand, ten thousand, or a million copies of a book are sold, keyboarding costs are the same. Commercial publishers may be able to absorb such costs easily if a book sells well, but the relative cost of typesetting books for a limited readership is steep. If W. W. Norton were to publish a biography of Louis Armstrong, it might not fuss about keyboarding costs. If the University of Illinois Press were contemplating the publication of a biography of Ann Plato, concern might run high.

The exigencies of the marketplace, then, have significance for writers. On the positive side, when a prekeyboarded manuscript goes to press, the time between that manuscript's acceptance and its appearance in print is likely to be reduced substantially. But there are problems as well.

PC/MS-DOS machines are popular, as are microcomputers operated under CP/M; Apple computers use proprietary operating systems; most minicomputers run under UNIX. IBM mainframe computers produce DCA files, and while most wordprocessing software designed for use on microcomputers is capable of producing ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) files, programs such as the early versions of IBM's DisplayWrite code their text files idiosyncratically. This diversity among operating and character-coding systems often makes it difficult for small publishers, in particular, to use text files submitted on floppy diskette. Fortunately, sending files to a publisher via modem, rather than on magnetic media of diverse sizes and types, obviates much of this difficulty.

A more serious problem is that, presently, there are no industry-wide standards for the electronic preparation of manuscripts. Word processors use highly diverse and idiosyncratic "markup" or "formatting" codes to turn on and off underlining, go in and out of boldface and superscripting, and so forth. And these already specialized

codes must, in turn, be translated into the particularized codes that specific printers and typesetting machines require. (This is the reason that users must often "install" software for a particular printer.)

To ameliorate this situation, the Association of American Publishers (AAP) is promoting the adoption of a standardized set of markup codes developed under the auspices of the Electronic Manuscript Project. If widely adopted and implemented by hardware and software firms, the AAP standard could, over time, make a difference, since it would support the coding needed to produce most conventionally designed books and journals. Texts requiring complex composition would, however, continue to demand specialized coding that would not be supported under the standard.⁵ By the end of 1986, the AAP anticipated approval of its coding scheme by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) and the International Standards Organization (ISO), and software using the AAP standard is under development.⁶

Until a standard is adopted and implemented, the advice that one can give writers attempting to provide publishers with the most useful text files possible is necessarily general rather than specific. An author might be able to obtain a list of formatting codes from a publisher and embed them in a text file. But, in the absence of a standard, no publisher is likely to demand that the author assume the responsibility for entering markup codes. Writers may, however, be requested to provide the publisher with "hard copy" which includes underlining and the like, then to strip out all formatting codes from the electronic text file and submit it along with the printed text. The person in the publishing firm who codes the electronic text file prior to its being read into a typesetting machine uses the hard copy as a guide to underlining, superscripting, and the like.⁷

Publishers have never expected authors to design their own books, so there is no reason to assume that they are about to begin. On the other hand, we know that, as printing technology has evolved, so has authors' involvement in the details of their texts' production. Until the eighteenth century, few writers exercised control over the spelling and capitalization in their works, and punctuation was not a concern for most authors prior to the mid-nineteenth century.⁸ By contrast, most contemporary authors have very definite ideas about the way that their books should look, from the layout to the dust-jacket design. It is not inconceivable, therefore, that, as the capacity to control the appearance of the printed text electronically moves more and more within reach, certain writers will choose to take advantage of it.

Is Bigger Better?

Live in the computer world for a while, and you come to take radical developments for granted. Literally every week brings the announcement of a major product enhancement or a technological advance which alters one's view of the "current" state of computing.⁹ But some changes obviously have greater impact than others. The present wisdom is that optical-disc technology is the wave of the future and that compact-disc read-only memory (CD ROM) will become, to borrow a metaphor from a recent book on the subject by Steve Lambert and Suzanne Ropiequet, "the new papyrus."¹⁰

Still in its practical infancy for text applications, compact-disc technology is now an established fact in the audio industry. The most noteworthy CD ROM product introduced thus far is BiblioFile, a two-disc release from the Library Corporation of Bethesda, Maryland, which contains more than 1.4 million machine-readable cataloguing (MARC) records developed by the Library of Congress. Included is "all English-language cataloguing since 1964 as well as cataloguing for frequently requested titles since 1900."¹¹

Although discussions of the text applications of CD ROM are often limited to reference works (such as the LC-MARC project), it seems to me that CD ROM's distinctive characteristics might, in the future, make it an attractive medium for a variety of authoring applications, including the writing of biography. (Currently, the cost of mastering a CD ROM disc is too steep to make it a medium of choice for most book-length publication. Prices tend to start at about \$10,000 and can run upwards of \$100,000.)

The importance and cost effectiveness of CD ROM for reference tool publication is clear enough: A single CD ROM disc can hold in excess of 150,000 pages of printed text, which is the equivalent of more than 1,200 5.25-inch double-sided, double-density floppy disks or about 30 20-megabyte hard disks. Alternatively, a CD ROM disc can hold 74.5 minutes of high-fidelity stereo, or 149 minutes of high-fidelity monaural, sound; 32 hours of "telephone-quality" audio sound; or 9,000 still-frame video images.¹² (Motion video is not possible with CD ROM, although it is with CD ROM's big brother the videodisc, a medium that is, at least in the next decade, unlikely to enjoy extensive home or office computer use.)

Biographers could use CD ROM to bring together some combination of the text, sound, and video capabilities mentioned above. A biography the size of Alan Bullock's Hitler, with an appendix the length of The Booker T. Washington Papers (all thirteen volumes), would take up less

than ten percent of a CD ROM disc, leaving room for, say, ten hours of recorded conversations by or about the person being examined in the biography, synchronized with or supplemented by 5,000 relevant pictures. Relatedly, biographers of musicians could supplement their texts not only with pictures and/or recorded conversations but also with pertinent excerpts from the musicians' repertoires. It requires little imagination to understand that the CD ROM medium will, when the cost of producing a master disc drops, present biographers with options previously unrealizable. Bigger may, in this case, prove to be better.

This Is Not The End

In the preceding discussion, I have omitted altogether one question that concerns publishers deeply but has little relevance for the biographer: To what extent should publications, particularly specialized journals, be brought on line? Once a file has been electronically keyboarded, it could be released solely through a databank rather than appearing in print (or on a CD ROM disc)--or databank distribution might become an alternative means of dissemination. Of greater concern to the biographer is the issue of the microcomputer's role in self-publication, a subject that no one working in black studies should be insensitive to given the substantial amount of relatively important black writing that has been privately printed.

If one harnesses a laser printer to powerful and format-sensitive software like Word, near-typeset-quality text can be produced. And with a generation of inexpensive laser printers beginning to make their appearance in American offices and homes, the ability to self-publish with style has moved within the reach of many.¹³ Printing, paper, and binding costs remain for "desktop publishers," but the expense of typesetting is eliminated.

Five years ago, it would have been appropriate for most humanists to question whether or not computers were relevant to their day-to-day activity. Today, quite simply, it is not, for computer-keyboarded and typeset texts have become the norm. We now need to investigate the many ways in which the technology delivered literally to our doorstep by the microcomputer can be made to have a positive effect on the practice of authorship in America. The computer is a research, writing, and publishing tool the limits of which are defined largely by the imagination of the person operating it. Those limits, I suspect, will remain under constant assault.

Footnotes

¹Aside from the Arts & Humanities Citation Index, which is available on the BRS network, the databases referred to here are on DIALOG. Citations alone, or citations with abstracts, are available for Historical Abstracts.

LEXIS and Westlaw, "full-text" databases for court cases, have proved invaluable to those in the legal profession. Unfortunately, we have no databases of equivalent importance in the humanities or social sciences.

²Conversely, a manual search might unearth items not disclosed in an electronic search. The forms of citation collection might better be thought of as complementary than competitive.

³For more information on these programs, see Jan Snyders, "More Than Word Processing," Infosystems 32 (Aug. 1985): 52.

⁴For a fuller description of ZyIndex 2, see Gregory Spector, "Text-Search Program Out in Non-Protected Version," PC Week 3 (22 Apr. 1986): 21. ZyIndex 2 is, on the whole, somewhat less powerful than FYI 3000, but it supports more character-coding types, its "standard version" is quite inexpensive, and the program requires less storage overhead than FYI 3000.

⁵One way to develop an appreciation for the necessary complexity of a formatting language that can handle every typesetting situation is to examine Donald E. Knuth's The TEXbook (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1984), which contains the coding rules for Knuth's highly regarded, extremely sophisticated TEX language.

⁶Paul Gleason, "MarkUp U.S.A. Conference," Society for Scholarly Publishing Newsletter 8.2 (1986): 1-3.

⁷Those who wish to avoid all personal contact with computers may be heartened to know that sophisticated optical character readers, such as the Kurzweil scanner, are capable of "reading" typescripts into a text file. Because such machines are quite expensive, they are not yet in widespread use, but some publishers have them, more universities are buying them, and the time is not far distant when the non-computerist will be able to present electronic copy to a publisher.

⁸See Philip Gaskell, A New Introduction to Bibliography (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972), esp. 110-16 and 338-43.

⁹As I write this, new versions of Word (3.0) and Nota Bene (2.0) have been announced. The latter is supposed to support up to nine windows and permit those wishing to produce a critical edition to build multiple tiers of footnotes.

¹⁰CD ROM: The New Papyrus, ed. Steve Lambert and Suzanne Ropiequet (Redmond, WA: Microsoft P, 1986).

¹¹Nancy Melin, "The New Alexandria: CD ROM in the Library," CD ROM: The New Papyrus, 513. One can also access the LC-MARC records in their on-line database form through the DIALOG network.

¹²See Bryan Brewer, "Compact Disc Interactive Audio," CD ROM: The New Papyrus, 273-90.

¹³Nota Bene and Word Perfect support laser printers, several of which now retail for under \$2,000; Word drives laser printers with panache. All three programs support automatic footnoting.

